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The Women's Quarterly

AUTUMN 2000 ◆ NUMBER 25

Is friendship a girl thing? A new book claims it is. *Charlotte Allen* says: Enough already!

Plus:

Jacques Barzun
Abigail Thernstrom
Mona Charen
James Bowman
James K. Glassman

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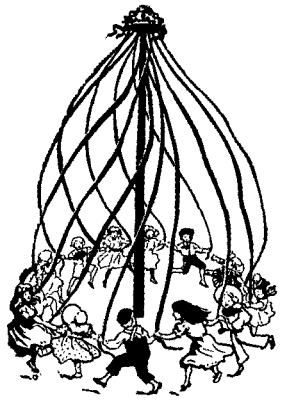
Diary



Hats, Gloves, and Aldous Huxley: An argument for single-sex education

I AM A PRODUCT of The Lausanne School for Girls. No, not some fancy prep school in Switzerland. My Lausanne was a highly eccentric girls' school in Tennessee, where I was a boarding student from the ninth through the twelfth grades. My Lausanne, which came out "LAUZ-ann," was home to both aspiring adolescent bluestockings and future princesses of Memphis' Cotton Carnival. I did not fall into the cotton princess category.

Perhaps the proudest boast of the Lausanne girl of my era was that Lausanne was almost certainly the only school in America that was let out not because the president had been shot, but because Aldous Huxley died the same day. We mourned both the slain president and the English novelist.

When word arrived that Huxley was dead, our headmaster, Walter Raleigh Coppedge, B. Litt. (Oxon.), immediately halted classes for several days of grief. Huxley recently had spent several days with us, even teaching an English class on Edgar Allan Poe—not actually my English class, but because of my fanatical devotion to the author of *Brave New World* and *Crome Yellow*, I was permitted to sit in and remember marveling, "I'm close enough to *touch* Aldous Huxley." Fortunately, I refrained from doing so.

Single-sex schools are held in low regard today. I know a mother who broke with tradition by refusing to send her son to Woodberry Forest, the venerable Virginia school; she was miffed that it hadn't gone coed. All I know is that I could never in a million years have asked Huxley a long, rambling, pretentious, tortured question—that boiled down to, "Does life have meaning, sir?"—had there been teenage boys in the room. (Huxley said it was a *good* question. So there.)

You may scoff that I should have been able to pose my showoff question in mixed company. But the simple fact is: I couldn't have. Woodberry Forest argues on its website that the benefits of single-sex education include "freedom from stereotypes so that students become eager to challenge themselves and take risks."

For girls (and boys) who need it, a single-sex school provides a safe haven. Where but in a girls' school would I not have been scarred for life by the trauma of those two dreadful weeks when I mistakenly thought Noxzema skin cream was a shampoo? Finally, an exasperated headmaster and my mother hammered out an agreement whereby I went to Franklin-Simon's beauty salon every Thursday to be re-bouffanted—that is, when I wasn't restricted to campus for my frequently unfortunate behavior.

I would never contend that a girls' school is Eden. There are few places redder in tooth and claw than a dormitory filled with adolescent girls. But if battles were won on the playing fields of Eton, I learned realism and survival in the dorm of Lausanne.

SOME OF THE THINGS we did at Lausanne strike me, in retrospect, as sweetly antediluvian. I fondly recall, for example, May Day, when we sang "Come Haste Thee, Nymph" and "Chère Lausanne," our school song (to the tune of "Believe Me if All Those Endearing Young Charms"—I kid you not), while lower school children danced around a large Maypole. We were clad in white from head to toe. May Day was considered such a big deal that, one year, when I was "sent home" for some awful infraction of the rules, my punishment was delayed so that I could participate.

As the rest of the world edged slowly towards protest and upheaval, we wore hats and gloves on Sunday. Whenever an adult entered the room, we sprang to our feet. "Bussy" McCall, our beloved bus driver, enjoyed sauntering into the dining hall just to make us rise noisily *en masse*. We were supposed to become "Lausanne Ladies," as quaint as that might sound now. Like Florence King, I am a failed southern lady, but that doesn't mean I don't appreciate the efforts of *chère* Lausanne—and my longsuffering mother—to make me one.

~Charlotte Hays

P.S. See page 4 for more on the lost art of educating youth.

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The Women's Quarterly

AUTUMN 2000 ◆ NO. 25

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IN *THIS* ISSUE

Diary: ***Charlotte Hays*** on hats, gloves, and Aldous Huxley 2

The Lost Art of Educating Children: ***Eugene Ham, Mona Charen, David Shiflett, Candace de Russy, Susan Scheinberg Kristol, Abigail Thernstrom, James K. Glassman,*** and ***James Bowman*** 4

I Know Just What You Mean—and Now Will You Please Shut Up! Is friendship a girl thing?
Charlotte Allen says: Enough already! 11

Karlyn Bowman's **Poll-Pourri** 14

The Token Man: What do men want?
Neal Lavon answers on behalf of all men 15

Double Trouble: ***Catherine Edwards*** says the spell is broken for Wicca 16

Interview: ***Jacques Barzun*** on the fall and rise of everything 18

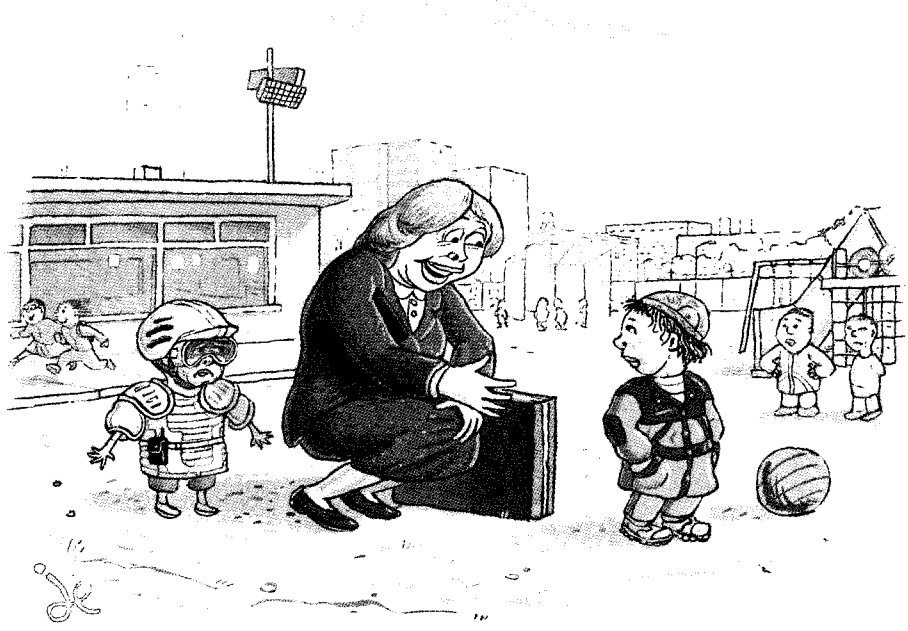
The Labor Department Speaks Softly but Carries a Big Lawsuit
Evan Gahr shows how it has made law-abiding corporations fork over millions for trumped-up charges of pay discrimination 21

Up in the Sky! It's a Bird! It's a Plane! It's a Sociologist!
Meghan Cox Gurdon reveals that the American Sociological Association is from outer space 24

The Newest Dilemma about the Oldest Profession: Legalization or "tart reform"? ***Christine Stolba*** on modern prostitution 26

Scarlet Women of the Silver Screen: ***Jon Newlin*** on Hollywood hookers 30

One Last Observation: Little Gloria, Happy at Last!
John Springs captures Gloria Steinem on her wedding day 31



"HELLO there! I'm Julia's play consultant."

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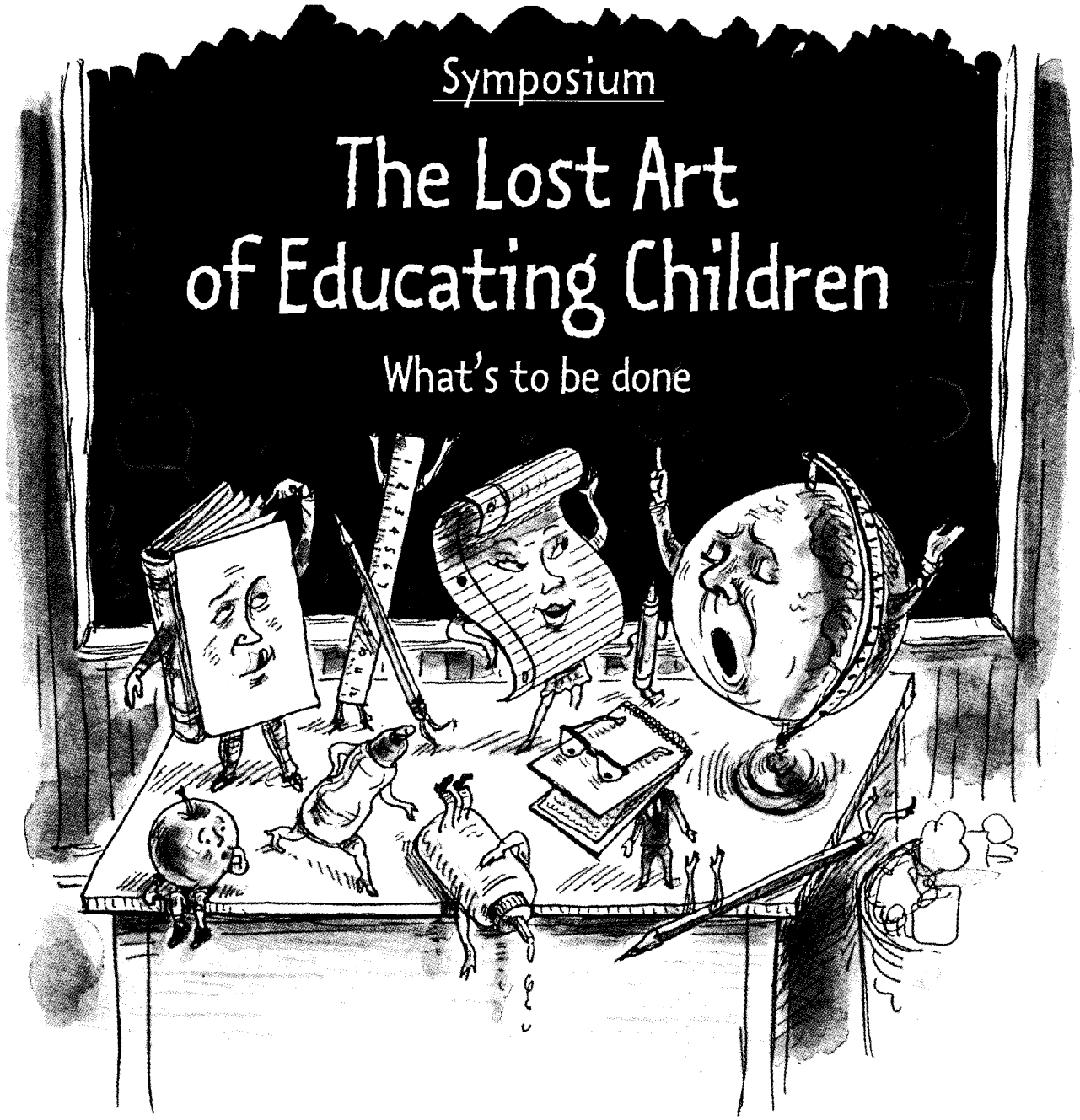
Symposium

The Lost Art of Educating Children

What's to be done



Eugene Ham praises a great teacher who couldn't get a job today

A LOT OF PEOPLE have said that Greenville, Mississippi, has produced so many writers that there must be something in the water. But some older and wiser types give the credit to a frail, Jewish schoolteacher, an "old maid," in the parlance of her day, who loved the arts and whose dramatic delivery was so much fun that for three decades students daily badgered her to read aloud.

On a September morning almost half a century ago, I entered the Carrie Stern Elementary School in Greenville to begin my formal education in what remains the most beautiful school I've ever seen. Like all the grammar schools in town, it bore the name of a remarkable woman teacher. A small, arresting portrait of Miss Carrie Stern hung in the entrance. It was a self-portrait, probably executed during the one year in the 1890s when Carrie Stern scrimped enough money to attend the Art Students League in New York. All the qualities celebrated by those who knew her are in the painting: intensity, earnestness, energy, compassion, and a fierce innocence.

Miss Carrie Stern had not majored in education—she was, instead, a born teacher. A school superintendent named E.E. Bass had no trouble recognizing that her broad knowledge of history, lit-

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erature, and the fine arts, and her love of young people more than qualified her to teach. Bass and Stern's shared notions of what constituted education are classically absent in most of the public schools where I have taught for the last thirty years.

With Bass' encouragement, Stern created and carried through one of the first public school programs in art instruction in the United States. Ordinary students, rather than just those whose families could afford private lessons, received instruction in drawing and painting, as well as exposure to art history tied directly to their studies. With no formal budget for anything but the most rudimentary supplies, the program persisted for decades. She also founded the first high school newspaper in the Southeast.

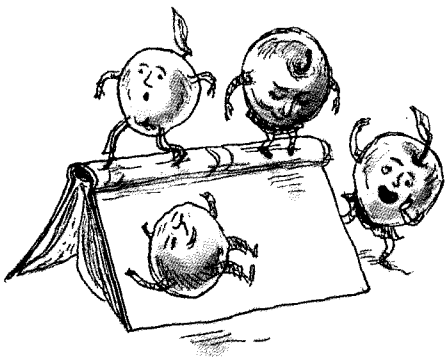
One year Miss Carrie Stern staged a production of *The Rivals* by Richard Sheridan that was recalled with fondness by the actors and the audiences even in my childhood. One late spring, during the region's prolonged dusk, she staged the pageant scene from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* beneath great oaks and illuminated by Japanese lanterns.

William Alexander Percy, author of *Lanterns on the Levee* (and uncle of the novelist Walker Percy), celebrated Miss Stern in his memoirs as a patient mentor, who was, during his apprentice years in poetry, his sole source of encouragement and criticism. David Cohn, who went on to become a journalist, wrote that she was a teacher who made the Italian Renaissance so vivid that he spent his high school years "as much in the Rome, Florence, Venice of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as in my twentieth-century Mississippi town."

She is said to have taught history as an engaging story with startling turns. My uncle once said that Miss Stern's narratives took them to the front in World War I far more vividly than the *Pathé* newsreels.

Miss Stern wouldn't be able to get a job teaching today—not unless she obtained certification at some dreary teacher's college. Her passion for her subject matter and conviction that art and history are essential for the survival of whatever matters in the human condition would count for nothing. In rejecting the creative, the passionate, and the learned in favor of trained facilitators, we have ensured that art, history, and literature become the frills available primarily to those who can afford them. ◆

Eugene Ham has taught in public high schools and elementary schools in Mississippi and Tennessee for thirty years. He now teaches at Motlow State Community College in Lynchburg, Tennessee.



Mona Charen argues that, if children are to succeed, adults must be adults

LET ME BEGIN with a disclaimer—our home is not exactly *Leave It to Beaver*. Our three sons do not address their father as "sir," nor me as "ma'am." They have to be reminded to ask, "May I be excused?" not to mention uttering "Pardon me" for certain unmentionables.

But we do insist that they treat us with respect. Example: Jon, nine, asks for a Diet Coke at 5:30 P.M. "No," I reply.

"Why, you just had one," he whines.

"The rules for adults are not the same as the rules for children."

Our culture has long since learned what chaos ensues when adults cease to believe that they have the right to impose upon children. The kids go wild. After each school shooting, there is predictable hand-wringing about inadequate supervision of kids; but it isn't at all clear that adults still understand what they are supposed to permit and forbid.

Conservatives tend to blame teachers and the education blob for many of our ills, and the criticisms are justified. But we too often skate past the parental abdication that is everywhere apparent. Talk to teachers and you will discover that many parents decline to show up for conferences, decline to support schools when their children are disciplined (often they are more inclined to sue), and fail to instill in their kids the automatic respect for adult authority that is essential to a smoothly running school.

While many parents still resist even mild measures like banning rude messages on T-shirts, a backlash is just barely discernible. Many public and private schools are returning to school uniforms. But there is plenty more this side of paddling and the dunce cap that schools can do.

At the school our seven year old attends, children are required to stand next to their desks whenever a teacher enters the room. They are taught that when an adult asks a child a question, the child is required to (A) answer using the adult's title and name ("I don't

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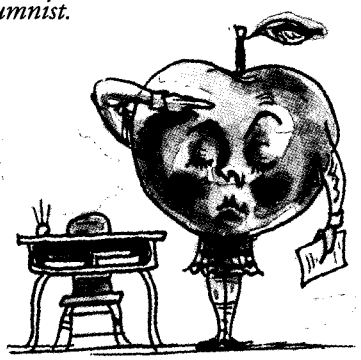
know where my hall pass is, Mrs. Smith,") and (B) make eye contact.

These rules and others like them, out of favor for over half a century, do not make teachers into martinets nor children into automatons. They do remind kids that school is important and that teachers deserve respect just for being teachers (how much do you suppose that would improve teachers' job satisfaction?). And they also make children feel safe. Children need a sense that adults are in charge. They know they can't handle it themselves.

Call it the "broken window theory" of education. Just as New York City found that cracking down on small crimes helped dispel the climate of fear in the city and even reduced more serious offenses, so cracking down on slovenly dress and behavior can improve the learning environment in schools.

Right? Yes, ma'am. ◆

Mona Charen is a nationally syndicated columnist.



David Shiflett says that we must throw out the goody-goodies

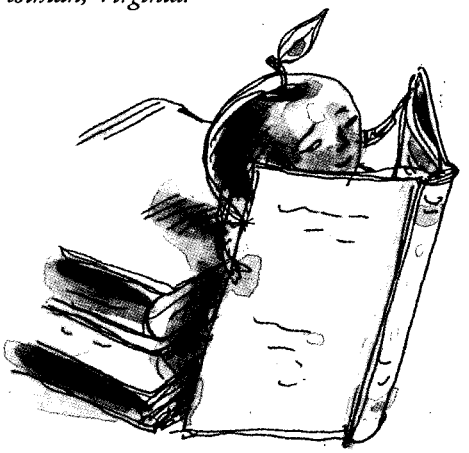
MEANINGFUL EDUCATION reform would require far too much bloodshed to make it a live option. It would be necessary to purge not only the ranks of administrators, teacher unions, and textbook writers, but also trim the ranks of powerful outside forces such as the entertainment industry—the most potent anti-intellectual force in America. Many a parent would also have to bow before the pitiless blade. Perhaps some of this will happen once the Islamic portion of society reaches 15 or 20 percent, but not a moment before.

In the meantime, those of us with children in the public schools can agree that some small advance would be made by curbing the do-gooders. These are the folks who try, through strenuous pedagogy, to make our children into timid, smoke-free, self-righteous, sober, properly nourished, well-exercised, and sexually aware little buggers. That they almost totally fail is beyond question. What they do succeed at, however, is sending home lots of reading material about avoiding nicotine addiction, respecting differences, etc., etc. Sometimes they include bumper stickers advertising their failed programs, such as Drug Awareness Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.).

While few parents want their kids to turn out to be stoners, nothing is accomplished by policies that, as has happened in our district, suspend children for possessing an Alka-Seltzer. Quite the contrary. These policies are harmful because they are stupid. How can children respect an older generation that punishes it for cold remedies while stuffing it full of Ritalin? Kids know their parents pay the salaries of the people who devise these policies. We all look like a bunch of bozos.

One must sympathize with the current generation. The popular culture provided by adults promotes sex and violence, but the poor kids get detention hall—and worse—for once-standard and accepted behaviors such as the unsolicited smooch and the playground scrap. One of my sons got a five-day vacation for defending a friend against a bully three years his senior. The "fight" included a total of two glancing blows. I wanted to slap the lad—but only on the back. ◆

David Shiflett is a writer living in Midlothian, Virginia.



Candace de Russy designs a reading list to save Western Civ

WHAT WOULD I DO if I were education czarina? Make people read works, both ancient and modern, that explicate, and, indeed, foster an appreciation for, the endangered ideas that are the pillars of our civilization. Let's start with this one: Reality is real. Many trendy thinkers today reject this idea, calling into question the basic tenets of the realist philosophers, on which the intellectual triumph of Western civilization hangs. Muriel Spark's novel *Memento Mori* has a character who carries around a notebook and jots things down. He's trying to figure out if he exists! As an antidote to this form of perplexity, I'm assigning Etienne Gilson's *The Unity of Philosophical Experience*, which is about the great realist philosophers; they believed not only that the world exists but that, by the exercise of reason, we can learn about it.

To uphold the ideas of rationality and man as a rational being with a

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purpose, or *telos*, I am assigning C.S. Lewis' *The Abolition of Man*, which argues that the Good can be apprehended by reason—perfect counterpart to chic nihilism.

Also on my little list are Friedrich von Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* and Ludwig von Mises' *Human Action*, two sophisticated accounts of the use of reason in social and economic endeavors and therefore arguments against state-controlled economies. I'm assigning *The Education of Henry Adams* to show the importance of personal moral accountability, certainly an endangered ideal. Adams was concerned about moral degeneracy in an era of great "mechanical" advances. He felt that men were all too often too lazy to think.

Also assigned: Mark Helprin's *A Soldier of the Great War*, because it poignantly portrays man's capacity, through goodness, to transcend the brutality of war and mass-killing.

We should not be afraid of saying that America is unique and uniquely honorable. Thus Thomas G. West's *Vindicating the Founders*, which argues that the Founding Fathers were principled men, is on my reading list, as is Gertrude Himmelfarb's *One Nation, Two Cultures*, which examines the chasm between today's dominant counter-culturalists and underdog traditionalists, who believe in such a thing as republican virtue.

To offset the attack on the manly and womanly characteristics necessary to create a healthy family, please read Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, which shows that even an imperfect family (and most families are imperfect) nurtures virtue. Emily Brontë 's *Wuthering Heights* may seem a paradoxical choice—talk about a star-crossed union! But I'm a sucker for Heathcliff and Cathy's wild and crazy passions on the heath. In any case, Brontë resolved the madness generationally by—what else—a marriage!

I'm also assigning Henry James' more staid *The Bostonians*, the tale of a manly man who rescues the heroine from the fate of becoming a feminist prune.

Out of space? But I haven't even gotten to Hadley Arkes, Dinesh D'Souza, Thomas Aquinas, Moses Maimonides, Tom Stoppard, and the Bible! ◆

Candace de Russy, Ph.D., is a trustee of the State University of New York.

Susan Scheinberg Kristol says bring back the classics

My father won a citywide high school Latin championship in Memphis in 1941. Although (or perhaps because) he later became a neurologist, he has maintained his love for Latin, not only for its usefulness in scientific terminology, but also for its succinctness, its orderliness, and its connection with the past. Some years ago he gave me his high school Latin textbook, and I was charmed to find in his youthful handwriting a ditty about how Latin is a dead, dead language: "First it killed the Romans, now it's killing me."

That line sums up the problem. Even to a talented student, the early stages of studying Latin are dry, exacting, detail-filled, even—dare I use the b-word—boring. To equip students to read the gems of Latin literature, like Virgil or Tacitus, requires that the teacher focus on fine points of grammar and endless drilling of endings, verb tenses, and vocabulary. Boring!

Learning Latin is not so easy as it used to be, either. No one seems to memorize anything anymore. Our grandparents could recite reams of poetry. They knew soliloquies from Shakespeare. We don't, and it's a lot harder to learn all those conjugations and declensions without the habit of memorization. Unless we bring back memorization in a big way in all subjects, I don't believe that Latin teachers stand much of a chance.

What do most people think they gain from studying Latin? Almost invariably, upon learning that I am a classicist, people make one of two comments: "I learned Latin, but all I remember is *Amo, Amas, Amat.*" Or, "I studied Latin, and it really helped me with my English grammar."

They're right. Studying Latin helps teach English grammar to a grammar-starved student population. Our two recent presidential candidates, both products of America's most elite schools, seemed not to understand that "between you and I" is incorrect, much less why. Many (most?) college-bound students cannot find a direct object in a sentence. Latin, with its workmanlike insistence on every noun's having an ending related to its function in the sentence, reveals the structure of language in a way that no modern language can.

The classics, obviously, have much more to offer our students than a

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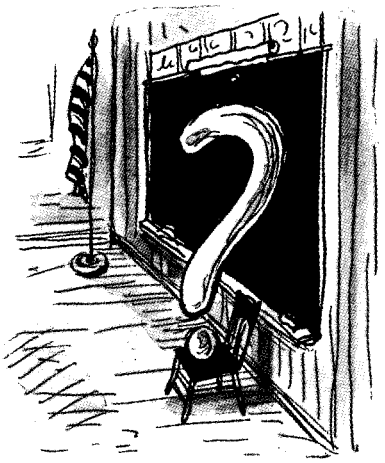
grounding in grammar. The best reason to study Latin (and Greek, for that matter) is to confront the amazing truth that some of the best literature of all time is also the first literature of all time. Young people should read the *Iliad* to reflect on martial valor and the high cost of heroism, and the *Odyssey* as a study of the meaning of loyalty, courage, and individual identity.

No one can expect the classics to return in a big way. Science courses, modern languages, computer classes, all exert legitimate claims on students' time and energies. All I insist on in my family is this: Each of my children, for me to acknowledge them as my own, must study at least one year of Latin. I hope even that small amount will be enough to make them aware of its elusive charms. ◆

Susan Scheinberg Kristol holds a doctorate in classical philology.



Abigail Thernstrom has some good news about the fate of public education

PITY THE TEACHERS' UNIONS. Seriously. I wouldn't want to be standing in their shoes.

Sure, Al Gore is their wholly owned subsidiary. And Joe Lieberman had to eat his brave words about the need for voucher experiments. But, around the edges, the fortress against change that the unions built is beginning to crumble. The National Education Association (NEA), the larger of the two unions, is sounding scared. It has hiked the dues its members pay in order to create a $62.5 million defend-the-public-schools fund. Never before have the unions thought they needed a massive public relations campaign to convince parents and lawmakers to stick with the current system.

It's going to be a hard sell. Everyone knows that schools in the urban districts, especially, are generally in dreadful shape. Too many kids aren't learning. Sandra Feldman, president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), said as much when she recently proposed adding an optional fifth year of high school for the students who are still woefully uneducated after thirteen years of schooling.

Black and Hispanic kids end up behind. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is often called the nation's "report card." And in the past few years, in all seven subjects tested by NAEP, the average black twelfth grader has scored no better than the typical white in eighth grade.

The school population in Washington, D.C., is overwhelmingly African American, and the level of academic achievement has been so wretchedly low that, in 1997, Joe Lieberman cosponsored a bill that would have awarded tuition vouchers to 1,500 children in the District.

"There are some who dismiss school choice programs [vouchers] and charter schools out of hand, direly predicting that these approaches will 'ruin' the public schools," Lieberman said at the time. However, "the undeniable reality here [in D.C.] is that this system is already in ruins, and to blindly reject new models and refuse to try new ideas is simply foolish."

It is precisely what most black parents believe. In a 1999 survey, the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies found that 76 percent of African Americans ages twenty-six to thirty-five supported vouchers. Among blacks of all ages, support had risen from 48 percent in 1998 to 60 percent just one year later. Last year, across the nation, 1.25 million low-income families applied for the limited number of vouchers that the privately financed Children's Scholarship Fund could provide. They know what the data confirm: Good schools have *good* results, even with disadvantaged children.

Choice is part of the American creed. Even though voucher initiatives were recently struck down in California and Michigan, vouchers cross the ideological divide and threaten to become a cause within at least some Democratic Party circles. In the spring of 1999, the magazine of the Democratic Leadership Council warned that "Democrats and others who attack vouchers and defend dysfunctional public schools are getting clobbered." Andrew Young and Robert Reich, both prominent Democrats, have become voucher advocates.

The scale of the voucher experiments is still small, but charter schools —public institutions free of many bureaucratic and union constraints—are bursting out all over. They might seem quite harmless; no taxpayer dollars are leaving the public system and the schools are accountable to the state. Those that fail are closed—unlike regular public schools. And yet the AFT is now demanding that charters (little islands of freedom and innovation) be reregulated and subject to the collective bargaining rules that stop principals from hiring whom they want, setting

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salaries in response to market demands, firing the duds, and so forth.

Only a sense of terror can explain the resistance to such modest experimentation. But the unions have clearly acquired a siege mentality.

It's understandable. Vouchers and charter schools are not the only threats. In Boston, a new and potentially powerful coalition of business leaders, parents, clergy, and children's advocates has been formed in part to confront longtime union practices. The very liberal *Boston Globe* has become a critic. "The Boston Teachers Union must stop driving the system backward," it editorialized in early September. "Self-interest on the part of the Boston Teachers Union can undermine student achievement," it said a few weeks earlier. "Too often, the academic needs of the system's 63,000 students appear to come second." Tough language from a usually soft source.

Teachers' salaries have long been determined by length of service and higher education degrees, but a number of districts are now experimenting with some sort of merit pay—an idea that the NEA rejected at its annual meeting this past July. Worse for the unions, New York has decided to let private, for-profit companies run some of the city's worst performing schools. "I am willing to consider anything that will give students a chance for success. That is why privatization is not off the table," the chancellor has said.

If a private company succeeds, it's the beginning of the end for the unions. They're already in trouble. They're not in big trouble—yet. But big change usually starts small. ◆

Abigail Thernstrom is a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute and co-author (with her husband, Stephen Thernstrom) of America in Black and White: One Nation Indivisible *(Simon & Schuster, 1997).*

James K. Glassman wants to unleash the "cruel" competition of capitalism on schools

I HAVE NO IDEA what course of study, what techniques of pedagogy or socialization produce well-educated children. But I do have a very good idea how to discover the answers: Let the market work.

That's the simple answer to the education question: Find public policies that encourage competition, so that the competitors figure out what works. It's the same process that has given the world high-quality, inexpensive computers, sweaters, cars, and hamburgers.

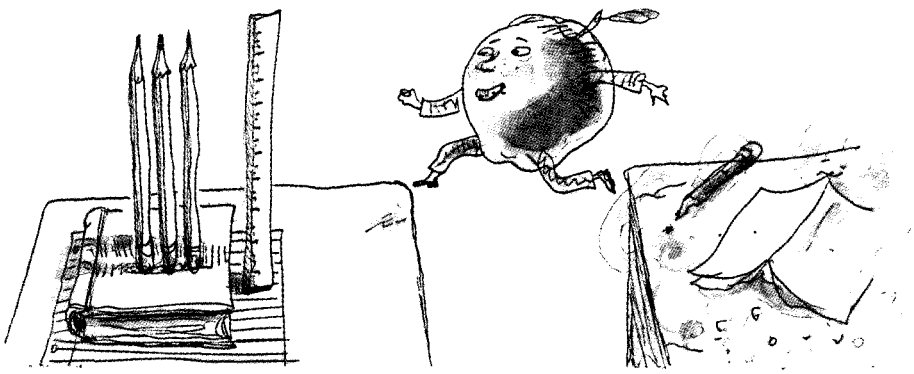
The answers may indeed be smaller classes, better-paid teachers, more Internet hook-ups, more phonics, less history, more sweeping tests. But, then again, the answers may be other things entirely—which no one has thought of yet. The only way to find out is by subjecting education, from kindergarten through twelfth grade, to the rough and tumble of competition.

The model already exists. It's called the university. Today, public and private colleges and universities compete for talented students through faculties, physical settings, course offerings, and prices. For students who can't afford the tuition, there are vouchers (Pell Grants, which can be used at any school, from Holy Cross to Yeshiva to Harvard) and loans. And states subsidize their own universities to keep costs to students low.

We could do the same for K-12, perhaps starting with an idea that Robert Reich, the former labor secretary, laid out recently in the *Wall Street Journal*—"progressive vouchers," which give families education money in inverse proportion to their income.

At any rate, for political reasons—not to mention ethical reasons—the poor should come first. Give them the means to send their kids to better schools, and those better schools will develop and spread. Yes, public schools (or, as Milton Friedman more accurately calls them, "government schools") have a place, just as state and community universities do. But we need to let a thousand flowers bloom, and that can only happen if the private sector is liberated and if the public sector is subjected to true competition.

Another route to competition, at least for the short term, is the charter school—a school that is funded with tax dollars but not subjected to the same rules (though with the same curriculum objectives) as conventional public schools. In reviewing charter schools in Arizona—the state with the best charter law and home to one-



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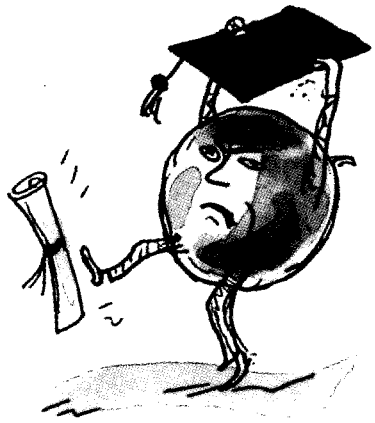
fourth of all charter schools in the U.S. —two years ago for *Reason* magazine, I found that charter schools forced conventional public schools to get better. The reason: When a child left a local school district to go to a charter, that district lost the child's funding (about $4,000). That got the bureaucrats' attention!

The reason that schools don't work now is the same reason that the sweater industry wouldn't work if it were a government-run monopoly. Or the computer industry. Or fast-food. Government should not be blamed for bad schools; it should have our sympathy. We have asked it to do something it can't do. Government can—and in some cases, should—redistribute income. That's the idea of vouchers. But it should either get out of the business of education entirely, or at the very least let others in so they can find the answers that government can't. ◆

James K. Glassman is a resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute and host of the website TechCentralStation.com.

James Bowman's modest proposal: Abolish the universities



EMERGING FROM the Great Depression and the Second World War as incomparably the richest and most powerful country on earth, with only the ideological and military threat of the Soviet Union to trouble, fitfully, her dreams of unending peace and prosperity, the United States made two decisions about how to use what was already beginning to be clear was her massive new wealth. The first, made in accordance with the country's romantic predisposition to idealize youth, was to endow its young with four years of leisure beyond the point at which they would otherwise be entering the work force. Like Rousseau's *Émile*, American children would educate themselves. The second was to invest heavily in higher education.

In part the second decision was a somewhat belated recognition (especially after the shock of Sputnik) of the importance of science and technology to the economic and military competition of the post-war world, but it also seemed to fit well with the first—to allow our children to "enjoy their childhood," as it was often put. Having turned their children's high schools into dating bureaus and sports centers whose educational function was limited to giving them a snapshot of what an education would look like—in case they wanted to get one later—America now was to provide an opportunity for many more of them to go to college, so that they could acquire the education there that they had been told about, but not given, in high school.

There were (at least) two problems with this reasoning. One was that the habit of leisure was a hard one to break. The demand that college should allow students to be at least as free as they had been in high school meant that, by the last twenty years of the century, serious education had been further deferred to graduate or professional school. The other was that increasing demand for what was still officially designated a "college" education but really involved an area of expertise scarcely as wide as the old high school education, drove up prices.

By the time that colleges began to realize in the 1970s that their students were willing to incur almost ruinous levels of debt not necessarily to learn anything in particular but just to be able to say that they had successfully spent four years in their charge, the whole enterprise of higher education had become a scandalous racket. Universities answerable to no one but a kind of trade-guild system of accreditation and tenure became centers for the employment of otherwise unemployable adepts of the reigning ideology of the guild, which was neo-Marxist in character and would have been dangerously subversive if anyone outside the universities had taken it seriously.

If they were simply shut down, the high schools would no longer be able to salve their conscience that their failure to educate those in their charge could be made up for later. And if all the money now spent on higher education were returned to the people in the form of vouchers, so that they could make their own choices about how best to educate their children, I believe that in no time at all it would be routine for children to graduate from high school with a level of accomplishment as good or better than that of college graduates today. The graduate and professional schools could be allowed to continue, then, and our newly competent high school graduates could apply to them directly if they felt the need for further, more specialized training. ◆

James Bowman is American editor for the Times Literary Supplement. *He formerly taught school in England.*

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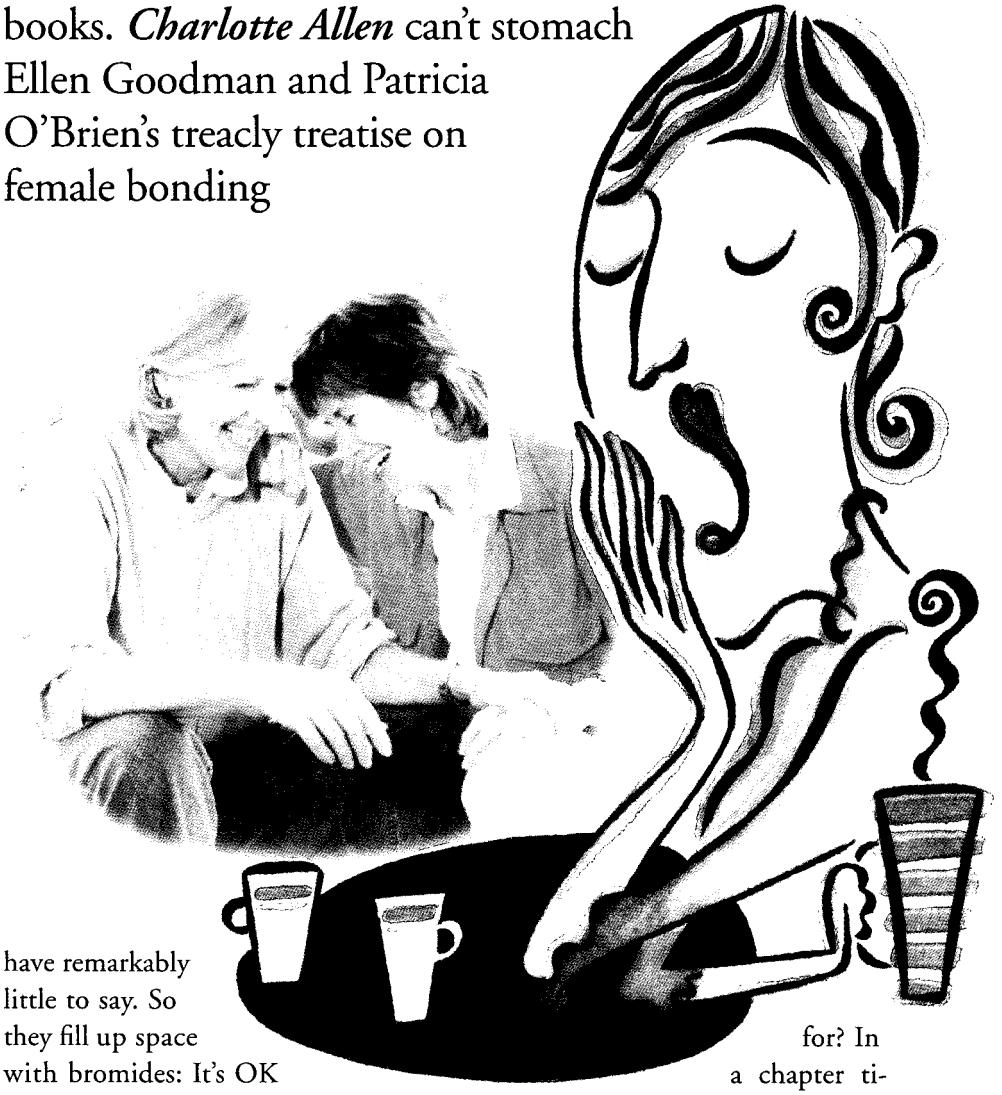
I Know Just What You Mean—and Now Will You Please Shut Up!

Talking, talking, talking—and trying to sell books. *Charlotte Allen* can't stomach Ellen Goodman and Patricia O'Brien's treacly treatise on female bonding



Syndicated columnist/feminist scold Ellen Goodman has been best pals for twenty-seven years with Patricia O'Brien, a onetime Chicago journalist who morphed into a novelist (*Good Intentions*), a self-help author (*Staying Together: Marriages That Work*), and a Democratic Party political operative (last big job: press secretary for presidential candidate Michael Dukakis). Now, the two have collaborated on *I Know Just What You Mean: The Power of Friendship in Women's Lives* (Simon & Schuster). Based largely on the pair's own history together, the book purports to serve up the meat and potatoes of female friendship, but it's actually more like one of the hot fudge sundaes that Ellen and Pat like to treat themselves to after shopping: sweet, gooey, and light on nutritional content.

We learn that Pat snacks on potato Air Crisps (speaking of empty calories), while Ellen prefers raw carrots. Pat pampers her skin with expensive face creams, while Ellen sticks to Lubriderm. Ellen likes dogs; Pat, cats.... Are you still awake? Both women, I might note, are remarkably well preserved and good-looking for their ages, judging from the numerous photographs that adorn the book, including a flattering cover shot of Ellen and Pat embracing and showing off their wedding rings.

The many photos in the book serve a crucial function: padding. *I Know Just What You Mean* was written under the academic auspices of the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Studies, which appointed Goodman and O'Brien writers in residence during 1999, but it's a lightweight effort nonetheless, despite an impressive bibliography no doubt compiled by a free Harvard slave who came with the appointment.

Although their mantra is, "We talk, therefore we are friends," Ellen and Pat have remarkably little to say. So they fill up space with bromides: It's OK to have more than one friend. Sleeping with your friend's husband is not OK. Linda Tripp was not a very good friend. Lesbians make great friends, although they sometimes come on to you. Be close, but don't form cliques (remember Columbine?). Borrowing money from a friend doesn't necessarily wreck a friendship—after all, what are friends for? In a chapter titled "The Bad Stuff," Pat and Ellen recall their Big Tiff: the time Ellen got up from a restaurant table she was sharing with Pat and sat down at another table filled with journalistic hotshots without inviting Pat to join her (Pat was mighty miffed, but she and Ellen made it up later that night—whew!).

Drawing by Nina Berkson

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Holiday Offer

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Independent Women's Forum

One may wonder why such a Baedeker is necessary. After all, same-sex friendships have been around for centuries, ever since Achilles and Patroclus fought the Trojan hero Hector in the *Iliad*. The thinner-in-every-way Goodman-O'Brien book dispenses with Achilles, leaving us only Hector (the general tone of Goodman's columns) and Pat. In our age of constant self-invention, in which tradition is attenuated, the literary classics are largely unread, and people have to take workshops to do such basic things as raise their children, there may actually be a need for what Goodman and O'Brien offer.

Indeed, the pair hint on their promotional website (*iknowjustwhatyoumean.com*) that they might be just the ticket for book groups: "We think our book can make for a special evening of talk"—and maybe sales?

For a book that extols the therapeutic merits of large doses of female confessional allocution ("In the flow of conversation, back and forth, women hear each other out, take each other seriously, care and feel cared for,") it offers precious little biographical information about its authors. Ellen and Pat inform us they met in 1973 as Nieman fellows at Harvard University. For journalists, Nieman fellowships are The Life: a no-work, all-expense-paid, resumé-burnishing year of dabbling in Harvard classes and munching free Harvard lunches. Pat hailed from the *Chicago Sun-Times*, Ellen from the *Boston Globe*, where she is now an associate editor.

Like all women from time immemorial, Pat and Ellen first sized up each other's outfits, whose smallest details they remember with dazzling clarity nearly thirty years later. Pat wore a "suburban mom" ensemble of "full skirt, heels, and bright lipstick," according to Ellen. Ellen had on hippie togs, "some kind of loose pants" and "craftsy orange earrings," according to Pat. Despite their differences in self-presentation, the two hit it off—or as they put it, "a comfort zone opened up." (There were two other women reporters in their Nieman class of sixteen, but no comfort zones to be explored with them; guess they were Republicans.) Ever since that Nieman year, Pat and Ellen have spent innumerable leisure hours—and even a few working hours when their editors weren't looking—dialing area codes 617, 312, and 202 (Pat moved to Washington, D.C., in 1976), to confide complaints about boyfriends and fellow journalists, and to experience, via sky-high long-distance bills, "the core of the way women connect." Other than that, the two proffer the reader few personal details about themselves, Ellen a telling handful more than Pat.

Ellen went to Radcliffe and had a daughter and an ex-husband who was a doctor, while Pat went to a modest Catholic college and had four daughters and an ex-husband who wasn't a doctor—Pat had to borrow money from Ellen. Ellen won a Pulitzer Prize in 1980 for her columns, while Pat's oeuvre is largely out of print. Pat, however, pulled ahead of Ellen by a length in the all-important Second Husband Stakes, marrying Frank Mankiewicz, former chairman of National Public Radio and current vice president of the Hill & Knowlton public relations behemoth. Ellen merely landed fellow *Globe* editor, Bob Levey.

All of this still doesn't add up to many pages, so Ellen and Pat fill it out with softball, sub-Nieman-quality interviews with other pairs of gal-pals: writers; artists; headhunters; college students; welfare mothers; Oprah Winfrey (who, judging from her quotes, gave Ellen and Pat about five minutes) and

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her friend Gayle King, editor-at-large of Oprah's new me-zine, *O*; the Indigo Girls rock duo; several fair-sex Democrats whose political careers are on the shady side of going somewhere (Geraldine Ferraro, Ann Richards); and an inexplicably large number of minor female sports figures. Why didn't they interview Anna Kournikova and her best friend? This means even more photos of female couples doing huggy-poo (note to any guys who may be reading this: It's a girl thing).

There are also quotations on friendship from famous woman writers such as George Eliot—even though Eliot had few female friends, as the friendships she formed with their husbands made potential girlfriends nervous. Finally, there are quite a few plot summaries of gal-buddy televisions shows (*Cagney and Lacey*, the Abélard and Héloïse of feminist companionship), and films, including *Julia*, which Pat and Ellen describe as "loosely based"—are they joking?—on the life of megaliar Lillian Hellman. But no *Thelma and Louise*. Even among diehard feminists, I guess, friends don't drive friends over cliffs.

UNDERNEATH THIS MOUNTAIN of whipped cream and jimmies, *I Know Just What You Mean* does have a serious theme. Its title, as its authors readily admit, is a knock-off of socio-linguist Deborah Tannen's best-selling book *You Just Don't Understand*, and so is its underlying premise: that men and women have a completely different way of talking. Underlying Tannen's theories is the "different voice" feminism of Carol Gilligan, the idea that girls follow different moral trajectories from boys as they mature into adulthood, developing through their webs of relationships, in contrast to individualistic, independent-minded boys. Goodman and O'Brien contend that this trajectory gives women the unique ability to "connect" with each other in friendship via those long, intimate conversations that men just don't seem to be able to stomach. While men and women "just don't understand" each other a la Tannen, women always "know just what" other women mean.

Women thus have the ability genuinely to communicate, to form rich friendships, while men are stuck with jovial insults and sports banter, forever unable to achieve real intimacy with each other. In other words, they just don't know how to yak on the phone. My first reaction when I read this was: Hey, if men can't communicate, how come Frank Mankiewicz rose to the top of a communications empire? Pat and Ellen, how would you like it if your husbands ended their phone calls with, "Thanks, I feel better now"? Goodman and O'Brien never seemed to have observed any real-life male friendships close at hand.

This Air Crisp sociology (or maybe it's more like Lubriderm) seems on first glance harmless enough. After all, men and women really do have different styles of conversation and getting close. But part and parcel of the Tannen/Gilligan/Goodman/O'Brien "softer side" analysis of female nature is the assumption that men and women communicate differently only because they are culturally programmed to do so. That means we can do something about it culturally: deprogram men to make them more like women. This is the subject of an argument between Pat and Ellen. Pat thinks that men don't know what they're missing, so why fix what's not broken? Ellen insists that "if they could really talk to each other, too, wouldn't it make life easier for them, and for women?"

This desire to re-channel male hormones forcibly is very Ellen. In the last Goodman column I read she was wondering why men's eyeballs have to bulge like the Capitol Dome whenever dewy fifteen-year-old girls clad in shorts and haltertops cross their paths. Instead of suggesting that the young ladies use common sense and put some clothes on before venturing onto city streets, schoolmarm Goodman defends their right to dress as tartily as they pleased—and then tongue-lashes the male sex for daring to stare.

Yes, it is admirable that Goodman and O'Brien have sustained their loyalty to each other over three decades. Many of us are similarly blessed with close friendships that go back as far as, or further. But many more of our friendships don't—an unhappy fact that Goodman and O'Brien acknowledge but don't really come to terms with in their saccharine book.

In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle maintained that true friendship could exist only between social equals. Indeed, friendships are notoriously sensitive to the slightest changes in the parties' income levels, career prospects, marital status, and even physical and emotional well-being. Your family has to take you in, but your friend, stressed out by your demotion or exhilarated by her new country-club pals, can decide that you're "traveling in different directions" and drop you like a flaming spud. Goodman and O'Brien claim that in these days of divorce and other "transitions," as they call them, a woman's relationship with her buddy "may be the most sustaining relationship of all."

If you can stand it. ◆

Charlotte Allen is an editor at BeliefNet.com *and a contributing editor at* Lingua Franca.

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KARLYN BOWMAN'S

Poll-Pourri

Sic Transit *Gloria Steinem?*

GLORIA STEINEM'S RECENT MARRIAGE made headlines around the world. But how well do we really know the feminist icon? In polling by Yankelovich Partners for *Time* and CNN in 1998, 24 percent of women said they had a generally favorable impression of Gloria Steinem and 15 percent a generally unfavorable one. Fifty-six percent said they didn't know enough about her to say. Perhaps more surprisingly, 50 percent of self-identified feminists didn't know enough about Steinem to have an opinion of her.

Six Figure Fems

IN JUNE, when NBC News and the *Wall Street Journal* asked women if they considered themselves feminists, 29 percent said they did, and 66 percent did not. The term was broadly unpopular.

Most self-identified liberal women did not consider themselves feminists. A majority of only one demographic subgroup of women—those earning more than $100,000 a year—warmed to the term.

Vouching for Vouchers

THE AMERICAN PEOPLE usually have good instincts, but, when it comes to certain subjects, they need to go back to school. When Public Agenda, the highly regarded research organization, asked participants in a focus group in Westchester County, New York, last year if they had heard the term "school vouchers" and what they knew about them, silence greeted the moderator. Finally, one woman suggested that vouchers were store credits to help parents buy school uniforms.

More depressing for voucher supporters were the results from Milwaukee, where vouchers have been in place for a decade. One parent was worried about his teenage daughter and wanted to put her in a parochial school with more emphasis on discipline. He'd never heard of the city's voucher program.

Close to Home

ALTHOUGH AMERICANS COMPLAIN about the performance of schools nationally, they're happy with the schools in their own communities. When Gallup and the education society Phi Delta Kappa asked people in August about the schools in their community, the responses: 47 percent gave their schools an A or B, 35 percent C, and 11 percent D or F.

A Lesson Plan

PUBLIC INATTENTIVENESS and satisfaction go a long way toward explaining why broad-scale voucher proposals meet with so little success. In November 1993, about 70 percent of California voters rejected Proposition 174, an initiative that would have provided every elementary and secondary school student with a state-funded $2,500 voucher that could have been used to fund tuition at a private school. In October polling that year, even parents with children in private schools barely favored the initiative, 43 to 40 percent. Much of the opposition to Prop 174 was stirred up by teachers' unions, of course, but they sounded themes that resonated with voters who were concerned that private schools would not have to meet state standards and that they would not be accountable to anyone. Those concerns, coupled with satisfaction Californians had with their local schools, killed the initiative. A second try, Prop 38, that would have provided $4,000 to all parents to choose their children's schools, was overwhelmingly defeated November 7th. ◆

Karlyn Bowman is a resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.

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Freud once asked, "What do women want?" As a man of long standing, I have asked that question myself, and more than once. However, women have also asked that same question—but about men. Not only have they asked it, they have answered it repeatedly, launching several careers and industries in the process.

Now I would be the first to say that women know many things. They know what ties go with what suits; they know the birthdays of their mates' nieces and nephews; and surprisingly, they know a lot about plumbing. Don't ask me why.

But what they don't know is what men really think. It's nothing like the attitudes attributed to men by the female editors of *Cosmo* and *Redbook*. However, for *The Women's Quarterly*, I have duly authorized myself to speak on behalf of all men. God and Robert Bly forgive me.

First, take housework. Surveys show men help out a lot more than before but are nowhere near the 50 percent threshold. So feminists sneer, "Women do almost all of the work around the house. But when men do anything, they want a medal."

Well...speaking on behalf of all men ...we don't want medals. But we do want a little recognition. After all, we are venturing into uncharted waters. Our mothers didn't teach us all the myriad complex chemistry involved in, say, washing clothes. In our maleness, we just plow ahead hoping that such wisdom is explained on the side panels of Tide and Clorox. It is not. We proceed at our own peril and suffer the results.

If the sportcoat didn't shrink, and the bedsheets generally remained the same color, we savor our small triumph. The proper response from women would be a smile or some slight vocal acknowledgement. This is what women seek when they come back from the office, and lecture us on the role politics plays in the workplace. Men have known about office politics for years. You want me to get excited about that, but have nothing to say about my miracle with the Maytag?

Then, there's shopping for clothes. Women usually say they don't want to go along when men trudge off to buy suits. But they do. When they accompany their mates, women examine material and patterns with the discerning eye of a human genome researcher hunched over an electron microscope; they start issuing a running tally of suggestions and possibilities that simply overwhelms male circuitry. Then they become indignant when their advice is politely rebuffed, and adamantly refuse to go along the next time. What do men really think about this?

Ahem...speaking on behalf of all men ...men want women to go along with them. Not because of their innate sartorial expertise. If women go along, they can't complain when men come home with a suit so bland it was featured as the "safest choice" in the initial printing of *Dress for Success*; or one so obviously awful, that she can hear the sales staff guffawing all the way back in alterations. If the women are in on the takeoff, as the old Washington expression goes, they'll be in on the landing. One thing men can't stand is high-octane female complaining. A root canal —*sans* novocaine—would be preferable.

Which brings me to the last point. Women always say they hate to make decisions for men. But that's false. They are more than eager to do so—particularly when it's about buying rugs or bathroom fixtures. When we finally do offer an opinion, we are deer in the headlights, the dead-on recipients of a full bore interrogation lacking only the hard-backed chair and dangling light bulb. You want me to tell you what men think about this?

Again...speaking on behalf of all men ...in this regard, we are like pack animals eager to let you take the alpha role, particularly if it concerns carpets or vanities. So don't get steamed when men accede to your wishes. We see this not as vacillation but as giving you exactly what you desire—without hours of discussion.

Now that you're armed with this heretofore forbidden knowledge, praise men when the laundry is washed and folded correctly (but not put away); don't complain if a suit comes home that even an undertaker would reject as too staid; and smile when your mate asks in all earnestness about a pending decision, "What do you want to do?"

Just follow my advice. It's freely given ...on behalf of all men. ◆

Neal Lavon is host of This Week *on Voice of America.*

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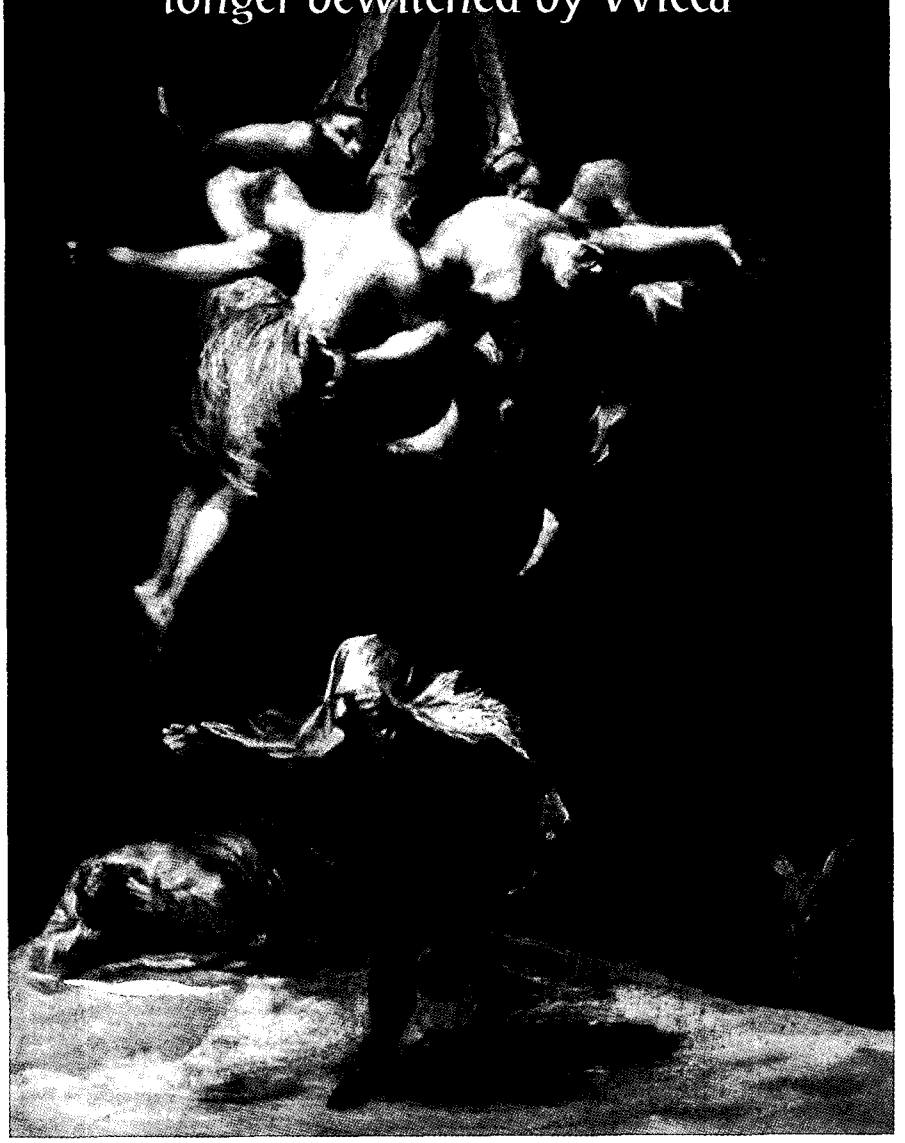
Double, Double, Toil and Trouble, a Scholar Bursts the Wiccan Bubble

Catherine Edwards reports that a prominent feminist scholar is no longer bewitched by Wicca



AT A PRESBYTERIAN retreat center in New Mexico, women are invited to "celebrate the feminine goddess in the land of enchantment and dance at the temple of the Living Goddess." But these followers of the goddess may be surprised to learn that one of the leading feminist scholars on the subject has written a new book arguing that goddess worship is based on pseudo-history: Wiccans posit a prehistoric matriarchy that worshipped a female deity.

No longer bewitched is Cynthia Eller, who previously in 1994 wrote what many Wiccans hailed as a definitive work, *Living in the Lap of the Goddess: The Feminist Spirituality Movement in America*. Wiccan superstar Miriam Simos—aka Starhawk—deemed Eller's book as one of the best of its kind. Starhawk probably won't crow so loudly over Eller's new work, *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory: Why an Invented Past Will Not Give Women a Future.*

Having exited the broom closet, Eller refutes Wicca's historical claims with careful documentation. Eller further insists that feminist spiritualists who promote the goddess are intellectually dishonest and are hurting women rather than helping them.

Writes Eller: "If we are certain we want to get rid of sexism, we do not need a mythical time of women's past greatness to get on with the effort toward ending it."

The name Wicca comes from an Anglo-Saxon word, Wicce, which means to bend or to shape nature to your service. Wiccans claim to worship the "mother goddess" and her consort, or companion, the "horned god." Wiccans believe these deities manifest themselves in nature. For instance, the sun would be the female goddess and the moon her boy toy. Wiccans describe themselves as followers of an

 "Flying Witches" by Francisco de Goya y Lucientes

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occult, pagan mystery religion.

Many Wiccans claim that their religion is the oldest on earth, that their god and goddess existed before all other religions. In fact, Wicca is often called the "old religion," a leftover, pre-Christian fertility religion, and the world—a fallen one where women are subject to the whims of men—can be explained through the myth of matriarchal prehistory. Wiccans say that women are realizing their power again. After living under male domination for too long, women can usher in a new era of peace if they are willing to throw off the shackles of male-dominated monotheistic religions, such as Christianity, and follow the goddess again, in all her forms.

Wiccans propose a feminist Eden, of sorts. They believe that early in the life of the earth there was a matriarchal society in which peace and prosperity reigned. People learned about nature and the earth, developed art, poetry, mathematics, and music. This peaceful existence was apparently shattered when male warriors, Kurgans from the Russian steppe, invaded these peaceful communities around 3500 B.C. The goddess culture that had lived in perfect harmony was forced to succumb to the violence of these patriarchal barbarians and was forced to conform to the dominating male values.

But patriarchy was unable to obliterate matriarchy in one fell swoop. Starhawk and Marija Gimbutas, a feminist archeologist, contend that outposts of the goddess culture survived among the Celts and the Greeks but eventually fell to the patriarchal systems that came about in the Roman Empire: Goddess worshippers were also severely persecuted by the Christian church. Goddess culture was driven underground and survived only in secret covens. Throughout subsequent history, many devoted witches and goddess worshippers were routed out and burned. The Salem witch trials of the seventeenth century were but a manifestation of this persecution. Modern Wiccans refer to the fifteenth century through the seventeenth as "the burning times."

Having exited the broom closet, Eller refutes Wicca's wistful claims about a matriarchal Eden

Some myth-adherents assert that childbirth in ancient goddess culture was seen as miraculous because the role of males in conception was not recognized by these matriarchal societies. Some say that men suffered from what is called "womb envy" and elevated women to the highest place in society because of their ability to bear children.

Eller calls such interpretations of history patently absurd. "They are either bad interpretations of the available data, or assertions based on no data at all," she writes. Eller goes to the historical record, which she says is vastly different from Wiccan herstory. In contrast to the peaceable queen-dom invented by adherents of the goddess, she notes, ancient cultures were violent. A look at the archaeological records of the Stone Age reveals that violent death was quite common in prehistoric communities and that skeletons still have arrowheads embedded in their bones. Even faced with this evidence, Gimbutas insists that no weapons except implements for hunting are found among the grave goods and that no lethal weapons at all were produced by Old Europeans. Scoffs Eller: "If the technology exists to hunt deer and pigs and to slaughter domesticated sheep, goats, and cattle then the technology exists to kill human beings, who are merely large mammals like the rest."

Ironically, there is no evidence to suggest that the maligned, "patriarchal" Kurgan peoples from the Russian steppe were particularly violent, as claimed by Gimbutas and Starhawk. The Kurgan stock of weaponry—as it has been uncovered archaeologically—is in line with that of other Neolithic peoples of the south, Eller maintains. Nor, she notes, do Kurgan skeletons give evidence of particular violence towards women.

Interestingly, many of the goddesses venerated by today's Wiccans were incredibly violent. The Sumerian Inanna, for example, was a goddess of war, and the Canaanite goddess Anat delighted in plunging her knees into the blood of heroes. But Wiccan feminists seem to find these emasculating deities lovable.

As for the notion that women were seen as able to have children without men—well, that's not true either. In fact, until relatively recently it was commonly thought that women had no control over the genetic makeup of the child because they simply carried the child, while the man provided the seed.

Eller concludes that, because feminists feel that they have been empowered by the goddess myth, they assume that these ideas are true. In other words, they are basically going on instinct, and Eller argues that instinct is no substitute for historical truth. Goddess worshippers had better do their homework, Eller writes, lest they end up furthering another myth: that women are feeling creatures, who can't be bothered to think for themselves—a myth feminists have fought hard to dispel. ◆

Catherine Edwards is a reporter at Insight *magazine.*

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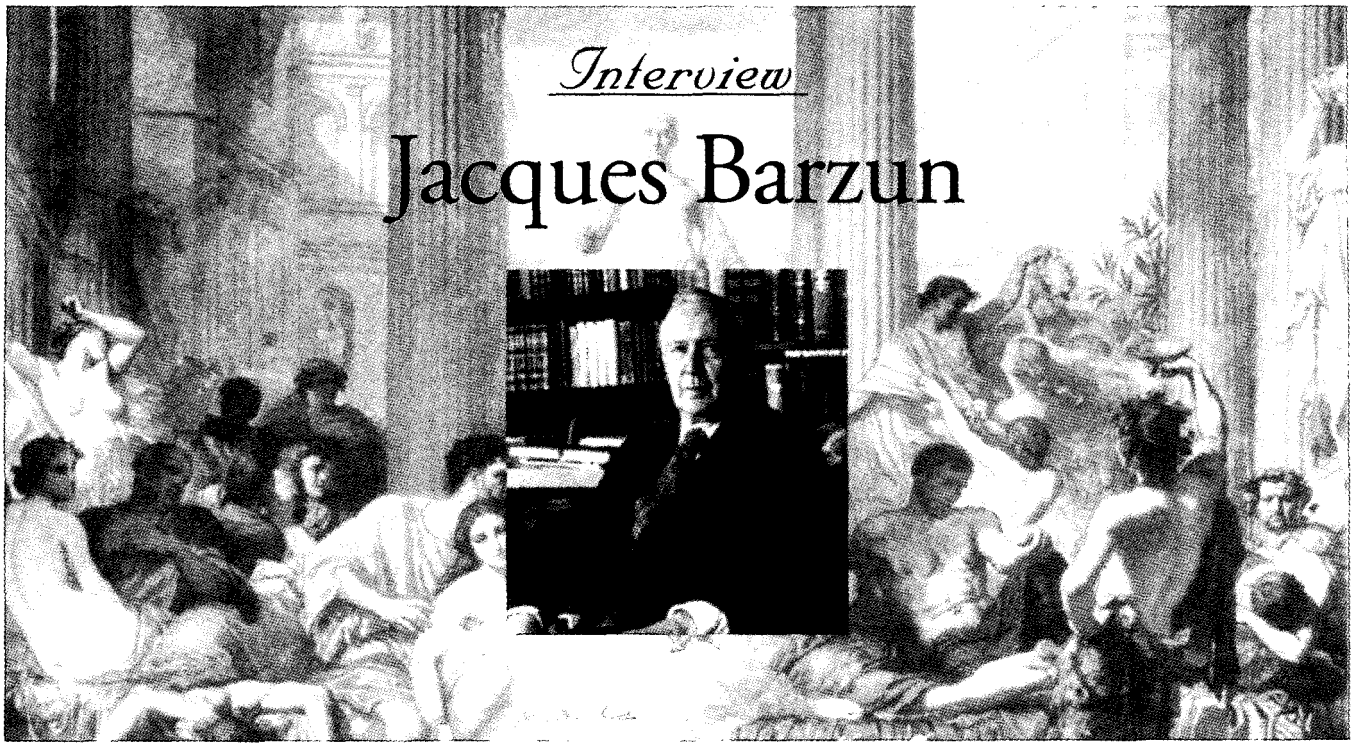
Interview

Jacques Barzun



AT THE AGE *of ninety-two, Jacques Barzun has hit the best-seller list again with* From Dawn to Decadence, *a magisterial interpretation of the last fifteen hundred years of history. Born in Creteil, France, Professor Barzun came to the U.S. as a young man and immediately joined the faculty of New York's Columbia University, where he served as provost and spent his entire career. Barzun lives in San Antonio, Texas.*

TWQ *editor Charlotte Hays talked with him about the state of civilization, why artists try to be immoral, and whether women have been oppressed throughout Western history. The answers may surprise you:*

TWQ: You propose in *From Dawn to Decadence* that our civilization is decadent. Why are we decadent?

BARZUN: Because so many of our institutions and purposes are falling away from their original intention. The nation-state is splitting up and its sovereignty is breached everywhere. Representative government is stagnant. It's very difficult to get anything done, and even when a law is passed, after much wrangling, its enforcement is often nil.

The public school is a wonderful idea, but we've lost that idea. The universities are in turmoil over irrelevant things, and the offerings that they make to students are often ludicrous.

The notion of individual rights has gone so far that our rights get into a tangle with the rights of others. We, in short, are in a condition of confused effort and small result. Nobody is particularly enthusiastic about anything except scientists and technologists, because they have a realm of their own where they can do a good deal without interference and where the material, not being human material, yields to their efforts.

TWQ: Is this decline irreversible?

BARZUN: It is irreversible in the sense that you can't just pull a lever or make a resolve and go backwards. But, of course, it's possibly very temporary, or it may last a century or two centuries. There's no telling. In the past, decadence of this sort has come to an end often because of a sudden twist in the course of events. The fifteenth-century decadence was reversed, you might say, by the discovery of America, which opened up all sorts of possibilities and turned peoples' minds away from what they felt were hopeless ways of life.

TWQ: Why have we turned against the glorious achievement that is Western civilization?

BARZUN: The hostility to Western civilization is due to several types of feeling. One is utopian: The defects of present-day society are attributed to the aims and ideas of the Western world. Another is historical: the "crimes" of the past—slavery, colonization, and so on. These are taken to be uniquely Western and unparalleled. For example, the American Indians are "massacred" by the Europeans. That the Indian tribes massacred one another and that some had slaves is forgotten. A third attitude arises from boredom with the past and the desire to blot it out altogether. Finally, there is the attraction of the unfamiliar. The ways, the religions of the

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Far East seem fresh and delightful, especially when they contradict the Western. And to top it all, the yearning to belong to a small cozy group with special customs and a separate language makes the Western creation of the nation-state look oppressive. This last tendency is one of the recurrent themes of the West that I call in my book Primitivism.

TWQ: So much of the book is about the Protestant Reformation and the conflicts about religion. Are you a religious person?

BARZUN: Yes.

TWQ: Do you espouse a particular religion?

BARZUN: I was reared in what might be called a semi-Catholic, French fashion—that is a good Catholic, but not intense, like a convert, or the way that many Catholics are today, because the church is attacked. In my time, the church was just there and people took it in stride. I am not a practicing Catholic now, particularly because of the conditions of the church, both its fragmentation and its extreme conservatism and other considerations. American Catholicism is a very different thing from French Catholicism or, indeed, European, and I would not fit into any parish or organization.

I'm perfectly willing to go to a Protestant church, and I find that some of them, which are called Presbyterian, have very high-church ways of being Presbyterian. So that the whole religious question today is almost incapable of being described by the old labels. When I find a choir, the minister coming down the aisle in a procession with the choir behind him in a Presbyterian church, I'm a little amazed. But that is exactly what I've encountered here in San Antonio, which is so largely Catholic.

TWQ: You've written a lot about education. Why are we doing such a bad job of educating people today?

BARZUN: We have forgotten what a school is. A school is a place where teaching and learning occur, or should occur. Instead of that, all sorts of purposes, programs, methods, and fancy gadgetry have taken the place of that simple, but difficult, operation of teaching and having others learn. It would take too long in this interview to tell you what teaching and learning require. In the first place, education requires well-trained teachers, which we haven't got, because irrelevant ideas have invaded the teacher training system, so that we turn out people who are geared to do something other than what teaching and learning require.

TWQ: What could we do to make our schools better? There has been no improvement in the last thirty years.

BARZUN: I know; we keep throwing money into the pit and nothing has improved. There are some difficulties. For example, the natural supply of teachers that we could rely on has been far exceeded by the number of children to teach. A born teacher is a very rare animal, and the number of non-teachers that you can train into the semblance of a good teacher is also limited and further reduced by the fact that we pay teachers so poorly on the whole.

Not only pay them poorly, but also give them very little respect precisely because they don't earn very much. So you see, it's a series of wheels within wheels that fail to rotate properly. Also, the idea grew some hundred years ago that the school should socialize, should teach morals, should help reform society by making the children better creatures than their parents, and so on. At the same time, we put great emphasis on the child. The child becomes an important consumer and much of advertising is directed at children, much entertainment is directed at adolescents, so that the adult world has receded somewhat, and, by natural consquence, does not teach the child at home. The child runs the home much more than the parents do, which also makes the school face a very difficult task.

TWQ: I was fascinated with the idea in your book that during the Renaissance the artist was to be virtuous. It seems to me we've done a complete flip-flop, and today artists are *not* supposed to be virtuous.

BARZUN: Oh, no. They're supposed to be the opposite in order to be interesting. (Chuckle.) It's a complex situation. Round about the middle or the early part of the nineteenth century, the artist became very important and as a result of that he was the object of study and of biography. And, it was found that he was not necessarily a good man or woman. He had foibles, he had vices, he was at odds with society, and it became a kind of myth that the great genius must be cantankerous and never pay his debts, be a womanizer, and all that sort of thing. There was just enough biographical evidence to suggest that this often happened. But what was not seen was that one of the causes of his being at odds with society was the fact that the artist had been thrown to the wolves, namely, the general public. Up to nearly the end of the eighteenth century, the artist had a patron, and the patron looked after him, and since he was looked after, he behaved a good deal better.

TWQ: You write that the sixteenth century was "full of women who exerted their talents like men for all the world to see and judge." This runs contrary to the popular idea that women were oppressed throughout the history of the West by what feminists call patriarchy.

BARZUN: The oppression or man-

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ifestation of power and intelligence on the part of women is, like everything else, an up-and-down phenomenon. It has not been the same way in all periods. To say that it has comes from not knowing history. There has been a modern illusion that women have been oppressed until the last fifty years. No such thing took place in the Roman Empire or in the Byzantine Empire. In many other times and places, women have been, one might almost say, dominant. Quite often the husband, who might have the title, was a do-nothing character or feeble-minded or the women ruled in the name of their son. One must know a bit of the details before one makes a generalization about oppression or superior opportunities.

TWQ: What do you think of the modern women's movement?

BARZUN: It has so many different aspects and directions that I would hesitate to utter any kind of generality. I think that in many ways it has been fruitful and certainly legitimate, an improvement on the past. But, of course, it has also led to exaggeration and it has enthroned a lot of ignorant ideas. Until it is all in, so to speak, it will be very difficult to generalize and say it has been in the main wrong-headed or in the main fruitful.

TWQ: What are some of the ignorant ideas that the women's movement has enthroned?

BARZUN: Well, one of them, as just mentioned, is that women have been oppressed until very recently. Another, which I've encountered a number of times, is that until that very same liberation, women did not write books or had no access to publishers, which is absurd. A third is that there must be some recasting, fundamental recasting, of the activities and attitudes of men and women. Improving their relations by modifying certain habits is one thing, but to try to remake the two sexes from the ground up is also quite absurd.

TWQ: There's a wonderful idea in your book—you say, "At the origin of the women's question in modern times is a medieval novelty called courtly love." How does courtly love figure into the women's question?

BARZUN: Courtly love was a system of ideas that glorified women as such. Not for particular qualities in any individuals, but for being a woman. She was credited with beauty, elegance, knowledge, judgment, and the power of bestowing love, so she must be dealt with courteously. The very word "courtesy" comes from the court, and courtly love reversed, to a certain degree, the previous balance of power. Men had perhaps tended to think that women were their subordinates and servants and could be treated in a very careless, indifferent manner. Courtly love created by the poets of southern France set up an ideal, which was just the opposite.

TWQ: I've always been rather fascinated with early feminists, Mary Wollstonecraft, for example, who seems a bold spirit, if not much of a prose stylist, and Théroigne de Méricourt, whom you describe leading a corps of women known as the Amazons, who marched with one breast bared in Paris at the time of the Revolution. They always strike me as so much more interesting than today's feminists.

BARZUN: Perhaps distance lends that kind of enchantment. They were less, how shall I say, fanatical. They did not, as it were, use the language of the political platform, because there was no political platform very much, except during the French Revolution. They did not, as it were, imitate the enemy, which is what the modern feminists have done. They've picked up the weapons of their antagonists among the men, and that has not done them much good.

TWQ: What weapons have the modern feminists picked up?

BARZUN: Abuse, total denial, and antagonism instead of a modified and roundabout policy, and therefore, more subtle and in the long run, more effective mode of controversy. In short, a demonstration of tactics clearly superior to men's crude ways.

TWQ: Can you tell me a few periods in history other than the Renaissance that have been high points when women have been powerful and active that refutes the idea that we've been oppressed?

BARZUN: Well, the whole eighteenth century is a century of great women, both in France and in England, and to a much lesser extent in Germany, but again very much in Italy, less so in Spain. One of the best known of the day was Madame de Pompadour. Another was Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, and there were the other so-called Bluestockings in England and elsewhere. Women were involved in creating the literature and in taking part in government, indirectly to be sure. But their judgment, their favorites, their dealings with their enemies, show them just as if they had been elected to do the job.

TWQ: Some people say we should not use the term "mankind" to refer to both men and women. You do. Why do you use the word mankind?

BARZUN: Because *man* means *human being* both etymologically and by usage ever since the words started at the start of all our languages, which is Sanskrit. Man does not mean male, except in a special exception which is understood by the context. So it is again ignorance and prejudice that thinks *man* always means *male*. The Bible makes that perfectly clear. I mean, the standard King James Version: "God created man, male and female." ◆

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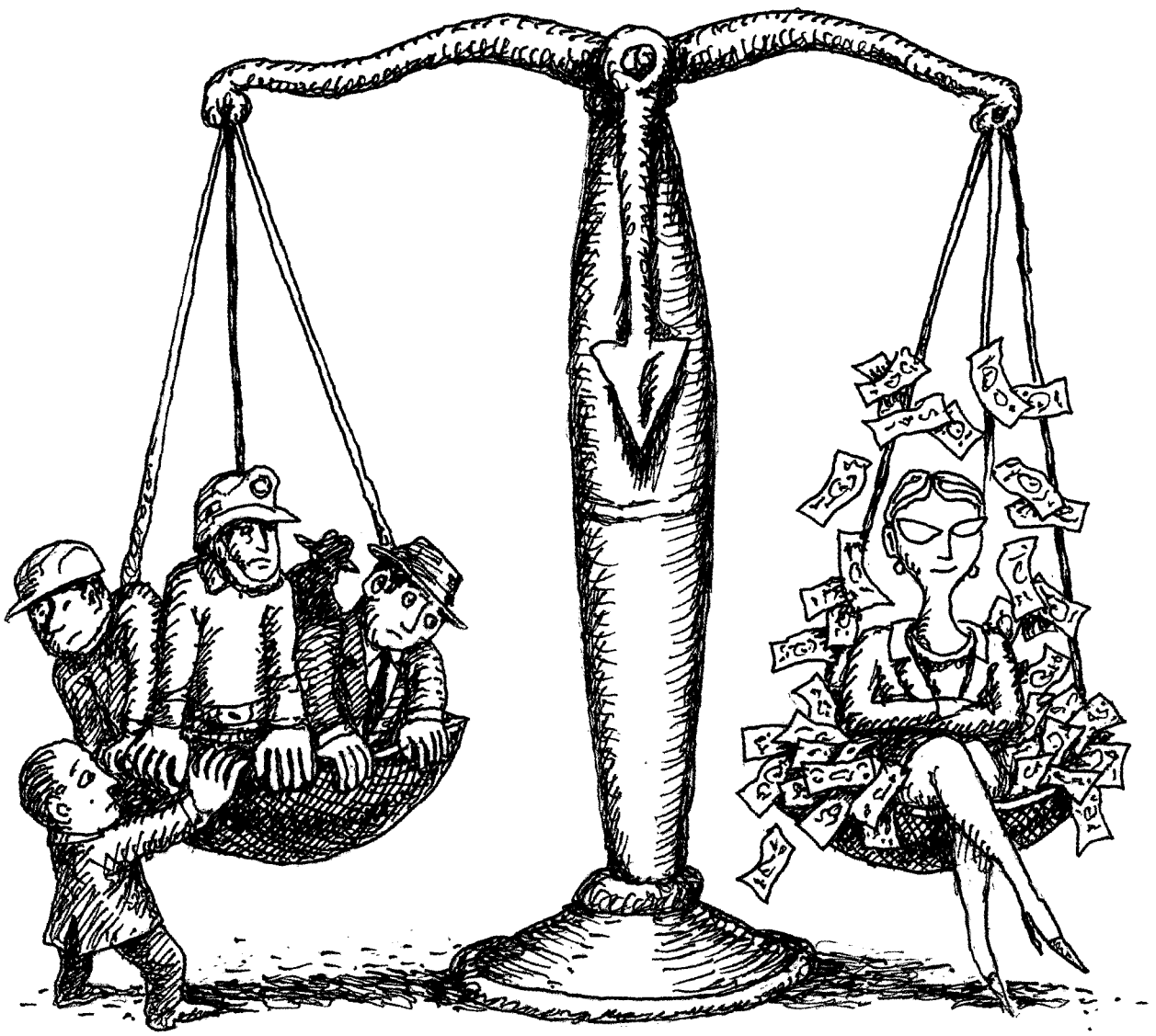
The Labor Department Speaks Softly but Carries a Big Lawsuit

Evan Gahr shows how it has made law-abiding corporations fork over millions for trumped-up charges of pay discrimination



On May 8, 1995, the United States Labor Department launched an investigation into possible pay discrimination against women working for the Texaco corporation, which does contract work for the federal government.

In what the Labor Department has described as a routine audit, investigators combed through three years of employment records. They found no hard evidence that the oil giant deliberately paid women less than men. Still, the investigation dragged on. Finally, in January 1999, the Labor

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Department called it quits—but only after Texaco coughed up millions of dollars to settle the government's highly dubious charges of discrimination.

Secretary of Labor Alexis Herman said she was pleased that Texaco had agreed to pay $31 million to 186 female employees "who had been paid less than their male counterparts with similar responsibilities."

Similar is the key word. Despite the specter of illegal discrimination, Texaco was actually well within the law. Federal law defines pay discrimination quite narrowly. Under the 1963 Equal Pay Act, employers can pay men and women different salaries for the same job, if the differential is due to seniority, a merit system, or a reason "other than sex."

The Labor Department did not bother to compare individual jobs at Texaco. "We did not perform individual one-on-one comparisons," explains department spokeswoman Mary Chung-Seto. "This is based on a systemic approach, not a comparison between Mary and Joe."

But isn't a comparison of Mary's job to Joe's job essential for establishing pay discrimination? For federal courts and Congress, yes. But, apparently, not for the Labor Department. Chung-Seto said that the Labor Department has no specifics about the job responsibilities of the women who were allegedly underpaid. None of these women—or anyone else at the company—had actually complained about pay discrimination, Texaco officials have noted. Indeed, the Labor Department frankly admits that it acted unilaterally.

Still, as Texaco and other corporate giants have discovered, when the feds arrive to "investigate" discrimination, the only way to shoo them off may be with cold hard cash. Last year, the Labor Department forced unprecedented multi-million dollar settlements on companies without actually establishing pay discrimination. That's no mean feat when you consider that in almost every case individual employees had not claimed to suffer discrimination; nor did the companies, which fall under the Labor Department's purview because they are government contractors, concede that any occurred.

But as the Equal Employment Advisory Council (EEAC), a non-profit association of 340 businesses in Washington, D.C., notes, few companies "are willing to commit the resources" necessary to disprove the allegations. "It appears that [the department's] methodology is to try and convince federal contractors that there is a pattern of pay disparities that should be remedied by back pay," EEAC president Jeffrey Norris said. "The agency does not appear to believe it is necessary to establish a legal basis for discrimination—all they need to do is establish 'facts' that convince the company it is better to settle than fight."

Why now? In the topsy-turvy world of Bill Clinton's America the "pay gap" is a huge problem, corporate malfeasance the cause. Just last May, Labor Secretary Alexis Herman insisted that women earn "seventy-five cents to a man's dollar." Not all analysts agree. *Women's Figures*, a joint publication of the Independent Women's Forum and the American Enterprise Institute, quotes data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth that reveal that women between the ages of twenty-seven and thirty-three make ninety-eight cents to a man's dollar. After that age, many women begin families and make career choices that affect their earnings.

It's worth noting that reliable evidence of a large pay gap is scanty. Individual claims of discrimination under the Equal Pay Act are filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)—and have long represented a tiny fraction of overall bias claims. Last fiscal year 1,044 of the 77,444 discrimination claims the EEOC received charged violations of the Equal Pay Act; the EEOC determined that 54 percent of the allegations had no merit.

The economic theory underpinning the Clinton Labor Department's investigations of companies like Texaco is "comparable worth"—equal pay for work that supposedly requires equivalent or similar skill. Under the comparable worth analysis, society undervalues "women's work"—or jobs that are mostly held by women. Men supposedly are paid more for jobs that require similar skills.

The problem with comparable worth is that it is remarkably elastic: How do you define "similar"? Doctors and nurses do "similar" work. Does it really make sense to pay them the same? Is that example an exaggeration? Hardly. Comparable worth advocates have claimed that the jobs of firefighter and librarian merit equal pay.

The Labor Department's web site suggests that many women don't realize how much they suffer—for example, a female cafeteria worker may make less than a male member of the maintenance staff; never mind that shoveling snow in sub-zero weather may, in fact, be more physically demanding. So popular is the issue that some Labor Department staff members sport (foreign-made!) T-shirts with the slogan "Equal Pay Matters."

During the Reagan era, comparable worth was ridiculed. President Reagan dismissed it as a "cockamamie idea," while Clarence Pendleton, then chair-

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man of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, called it the "looniest idea since loony tunes." At the same time, however, union lawyers set the stage for the current situation. They contended in lawsuits that federal law required equal pay for so-called equivalent work. The 1963 Equal Pay Act, however, said no such thing.

When Congress passed the Equal Pay Act, it expressly rejected comparable worth. In fact, the act defines pay discrimination quite narrowly: No employer may discriminate on the basis of sex by "paying wages to employees ...at a rate less than the rate at which he pays wages to employees of the opposite sex...for equal work on jobs, the performance of which requires equal skill, effort, and responsibility, and which are performed under similar working conditions."

While the lawsuits didn't fare well in court, the lawyers learned that when a city or state got bad press from a lawsuit, municipal officials would try to stave off more bad press by re-negotiating contracts to increase pay for predominantly female jobs. Lawsuits became the opening gambit of the "bargaining" process. Throughout the 1980s, according to comparable worth advocates, state and city governments made some $500 million in "pay equity" adjustments. But the private sector remained almost entirely untouched.

This changed during the Clinton administration, when the private sector emerged as a target for comp worth enthusiasts at the Labor Department. The department's Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP), which was set up to oversee implementation of a 1963 Lyndon Johnson executive order regarding non-discrimination—and, as later amended affirmative action—leads the way. Every prime contractor or sub-contractor with fifty or more employees and a contract worth at least $50,000 is required to develop a written affirmative action program. The OFCCP has a powerful weapon—"debarment," or the loss of federal contracts. That is a serious threat. Assistant Labor Secretary Bernard Anderson, who oversees the OFCCP, has compared debarment to a "nuclear bomb."

Corporate insiders complain that the deck is further stacked against them because of an aggressive system of accounting developed by Joseph DuBray, a nonpolitical appointee who runs the OFCCP regional office in Philadelphia. According to OFCCP head Shirley Wilcher, DuBray, in the early 1990s, devised a new way to examine pay rolls for evidence of possible pay discrimination. As pieced together from interviews with employment lawyers and a review of the department's own literature, the DuBray method works like this: Labor Department "compliance officers" examine a company's pay grades, which usually have several kinds of jobs. For each of a company's many salary grades, the OFCCP calculates the median pay for women and minorities, plus the overall median. (DuBray is usually focused on compensation levels for women, not minorities.)

After much combing through data, the government can usually find some pay grades where women or minorities are below the median. The Labor Department then assumes it has uncovered evidence of possible discrimination. And short of going to court, there is no clear-cut method for corporations to show otherwise. Most companies would rather settle than fight, says employment lawyer Paul Grossman, who says DuBray's system is "cherry picking" and a "trap for the unwary."

Take the case of Boeing. In mid-1998, according to legal documents, Boeing and the OFCCP were engaged in negotiations involving findings of race- and gender-based pay discrimination at Boeing facilities in Ridley Park, Pa., and Long Beach, Calif. The findings were based on the DuBray analysis; Boeing insisted on the more sophisticated "multiple regression analysis." This is a computer analysis that factors in such things as seniority in determining pay grades.

Courts have held that a multiple regression analysis can be used in such cases. But the OFCCP demanded that Boeing use the DuBray method. Boeing refused, and the OFCCP simply launched a new audit to further pressure Boeing, the company contends. Call it negotiation by investigation.

Ultimately, Boeing proved to be a paper tiger. The aerospace giant, which had $20 billion in government contracts at stake, eventually caved. In November 1999, the Labor Department announced that Boeing agreed to a $4.5 million settlement to correct pay "disparities" among women and minority workers.

Shirley Wilcher scoffs at the idea that the federal government can bully Big Business. "It's hard to believe any of those corporations would fold. Boeing didn't just give away that money," she said in a brief interview. Wilcher argued that the OFCCP's techniques are "far more complicated" than critics claim, adding that companies voluntarily enter into these pay equity agreements. True enough. But doesn't this sound like Willie Sutton explaining he's not the least bit coercive because bank tellers voluntarily turn over the money? ◆

Evan Gahr, a research fellow at the Hudson Institute, writes frequently for the American Spectator.

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Up in the Sky! It's a Bird! It's a Plane! It's a Sociologist!

Meghan Cox Gurdon says that, if men are from Mars and women are from Venus, sociologists are from outer-galactic space

Every so often, a lump of alien material hurtles for millions of miles through the solar system and thumps to earth. Someone finds it, turns it over wonderingly in his hands, and marvels at the mysterious worlds far beyond the familiar contours of our own human society. He may shake his head, look into the sky, and murmur: "Just think —somewhere out there may be intelligent life."

Just such an intergalactic lump landed in my sitting room recently, surprising me as I leisurely sipped a glass of sauvignon blanc. Whump!

It turned out not to be a meteorite, but a thick soft-cover publication. Nevertheless, it clearly had come through the cold depths of space from a galaxy unlike our own. "Oppression, Domination & Liberation: Challenges for the Twenty-first Century," read the cover, showing that this was the program of this year's annual gathering of an organization called the American Sociological Association (ASA). The meeting was held in Washington, D.C., this past August. On the cover of the book is a drawing of many struggling hands reaching upwards from a circle of chains.

Cautiously, like Neil Armstrong stepping out of the capsule, I opened it. The thing's unearthly nature was immediately apparent: "A fundamental problem of the twenty-first century is the persistence and intensification of social oppression, domination, and inequality," read the introductory text. This took a moment to sink in. Just think—somewhere out there is a place where the course of history is running in the opposite direction to the one so evident on earth.

OK, enough of this over-extended metaphor. Here we are, only a year into the new century, and already the ASA claims that "domination" has intensified! That's certainly true for Falun Gong adherents in China, and for pretty much everyone in Sierra Leone; but is it the case elsewhere? Perhaps, to sociologists, the horrors of the twentieth century are but a gnat's bite to the unpleasantness already brewing in the new millennium.

Accompanying the conference program is a fat book of sociological abstracts, which are highly condensed versions of the scholarly papers presented, in this case, at the ASA's summer conference. The book contains roughly six hundred such distillations, each the product of hours of labor by mostly North American academics. Maybe here would be evidence that domination and other social evils are worsening.

My plan was to glance through the pages, then make dinner. Two-and-a-half hours later, I looked up. The room was dark. Like the victim of an extraterrestrial abduction, I had been transported into a remote and airless place and found myself, on return, somewhat disoriented.

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Lesbian Barbies! Domestic violence! Black feminist resistance! Multicultural people with AIDS! To read page after page of abstracts is to step behind the looking glass—into a world beset with questions of homosexuality and disease, of "whiteness" and class struggle, of "silenced voices" and racist homicide.

Sociologists have all of human society as their terrain; they can choose just about any arena of activity for their inquiries. So what interests them? Why, gender, race, and class—with plenty of good, clean Marxist analysis. A flip through the pages brings "Globalization and the Uses of Gay Liberation," followed by "Gendered Virginity," "Exploring Critical Feminist Pedagogy," and "Hoop Dreams and Life Schemes: Women, Sport, and Social Mobility," in which author Jane Downing, of the University of Missouri, argues "that the extent of this mobility is limited by"—you guessed it!—"gender, class, and race."

I suppose none of this should be a surprise. Critics of modern academia have complained for more than a generation about the ideological straitjacket enveloping campuses in the English-speaking world. Still, it's fantastic to contemplate afresh the obsessive single-mindedness and the naked politicization of the field of sociology. While Marxism lies discredited across the globe, most thoroughly in those countries where its dictates prevailed under communism, eggheads in American universities still ponder its applicability to modern life. While most American women tell pollsters they do not consider themselves feminists, in academia, female experience is interpreted almost exclusively through the lens of radical feminism. Yet of art, music, love, beauty—the higher sentiments, the finer things that animate us—there is, amongst sociologists, apparently no curiosity whatever. Even the technological revolution gets only a few mentions in the ASA documents. There's "An Exploratory Study of Feminists in Cyberspace," and "Nazis on the Net," but, then, there would be, wouldn't there?

What is pleasing, though, is the way in which sociologists' darkest expectations are not always borne out. One senses the authors' perplexity when this happens. For example, in a study detailed for the ASA, Fred Pincus of the University of Maryland looked at the experience of twenty-seven "alleged victims" of reverse discrimination. Puzzlingly, "little evidence was found to show that the respondents expressed attitudes consistent with traditional prejudice or right-wing extremism." Fancy that! In another paper, "Children's Attribution of Needs and Feelings to Virtual Pets: Does Gender Matter?" Elizabeth Osborn at Saint Mary's College in Maryland discovered that "gender issues did not play a particularly important role for how they interpreted & created their internal world."

My favorite example, though, is the dread dilemma faced by Molly Andrews, at the University of East London in the UK. In "Feminism and Non-Feminist Women: Meeting the Challenge," she wonders, "... if women do not see themselves as objects of oppression on the basis of gender and indeed resist a gendered reading of their life story, regardless of the circumstances of their lives, the researcher is apparently confronted with an uncomfortable choice: Must she either privilege her own interpretation of another's life—a hallmark of masculinist methodology—or compromise her commitment to challenging this oppression?" Gee, Molly, maybe some women aren't oppressed. And maybe academics shouldn't be "challenging oppression" in the first place, but trying to discover the truth.

Obviously it's unfair to damn all sociologists just because some are obsessed with fashionable, if passé, left-wing issues. Here and there in the ASA's book of abstracts, like a patch of green in the desert, one finds a nice, stodgy, old-fashioned line of enquiry. There's "Ethno-Nationalist Conflict in Gorbachev's Soviet Union," for example, "Public Support for Gun Control 1996-1999," and "The Rise of Non-secular Nationalism in Iran." Somehow, one suspects that this sort of research may have lasting value; it marks something real, rather than piling yet more perceived grievances on to yet another benighted minority.

But overall, one has to ask whether the reductive, victim-obsessed haruspicating of most sociologists is really the stuff of scholarship. Or whether it brings any student a whit closer to the heights of learning and understanding, of humanity and intelligence that once were thought to be the purpose of a university education.

Never before in human history have more people lived as long—or as prosperously—as they do now. Never before has so much freedom been the common experience of so many ordinary men and women. The worst of the twentieth century—the fascism, totalitarianism, concentration camps, and gulags—have been defeated. Yet the American Sociological Association declares that social oppression, domination, and inequality are intensifying. If ever there were an organizational declaration of foolishness and irrelevance, that surely is it. ◆

Meghan Cox Gurdon is a writer living in Toronto.

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The Newest Dilemma About the Oldest Profession

Should prostitution be legal or is "tart reform" enough? *Christine Stolba* writes of courtesans, fallen women, and "Who Wants to Marry a Millionaire?"

In history and in literature she has been the subject of unseemly fascination and ceaseless censure, the "wanton woman" capable of wreaking havoc. But she has also been the "hooker with a heart of gold," who provides comfort to the common man, the working girl fallen upon hard times. In the modern era, she has been portrayed alternatively as a symbol of cultural and moral decline, an innocent victim of male lust, a public health nuisance, and even a cinematic heroine.

Prostitution touches the rawest of society's moral nerves. This is particularly true in the United States, which is often viewed by its European cousins as hopelessly unsophisticated in its approach to sex. So the question should be asked: In an era when elementary-school children are suing for sexual harassment, television sitcoms include blatant references to sex of various kinds, and the public is privy to excruciating details about President Clinton's sexual appetite, is it time to reassess our attitude toward the world's oldest profession?

Americans can agree that the exploitation of children for prostitution is wrong and must be ended, but things get muddy when one begins talking about adults. Americans have not reached a consensus on the issue of legalized prostitution.

The dilemma over legalizing prostitution is actually several dilemmas, because prostitution is a highly stratified business. Styles of sexual commerce range from the high-class call girl to the crack whore—perhaps even to participants on the recent television game show "Who Wants to Marry a Millionaire?" Some manifestations of the world's oldest profession can appear glamorous, such as the courtesans of seventeenth-century Europe, who were fixtures of royal households and whose exotic allure was powerful enough, as historian Antonia Fraser has noted, to generate sympathetic and even admiring treatment in the literature of the day. Such flattering portrayals have warred with more negative assessments of prostitutes throughout history as inherently depraved harlots—the ultimate bad girls.

Historically, debates over prostitution have hinged on society's perception of whether she could or would reform. In the United States in the nineteenth century (when more than 7,000 prostitutes plied their trade in New York City alone) reform was on the minds of members of the American Female Moral Reform Society, who pledged to abolish prostitution through Christian conversion and the curbing of male licentiousness.

Their tactics were confrontational. Members of the New York chapter would decamp to the city's houses of ill repute on Sunday mornings, where they would loudly recite Bible passages and sing hymns.

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Today, the debate over prostitution is as much about the question of economic opportunities for women as morality. A loosely organized coalition of people in this country believes the time has come to legalize the oldest profession. They insist that prostitution is a victimless crime.

The most vocal constituency supporting legalization is sex workers themselves. Prostitutes view their work as an outgrowth of the service industry, though admittedly one with an image problem. Removing the taint of illegality would do much toward improving working conditions and clearing up misunderstandings about sex work, they argue. It would also discourage economic exploitation of prostitutes by pimps or brothel owners.

The preeminent prostitute's union is COYOTE, which stands for "Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics." Founded by Margo St. James in 1973, COYOTE works to decriminalize prostitution and end "the stigma associated with sexual work."

Another key union player is PONY —Prostitutes of New York, whose logo features a high-heel-clad, naked woman with flowing hair sitting astride a horse. PONY "works to bring all people from different areas of the sex industry together" to "promote professional standards within their sector" and even "to learn more about the history of the world's oldest profession and its allied industries."

Some physicians have come on board favoring legalization. In 1993, a physician and lecturer in women's health—Dr. Mary Hepburn—argued for decriminalization of prostitution in the pages of the *British Medical Journal.* She argued that decriminalization would facilitate better health education among prostitutes and thus prevent the spread of diseases such as AIDS. Dr. Joycelyn Elders, former surgeon general under President Clinton, endorsed the legalization of prostitution in the forward to a book called *Prostitution: On Whores, Hustlers, and Johns.* "Why are we so upset about sex workers selling sexual acts to consenting adults?" she asks.

There are disagreements among legalization advocates, however. Sex workers' rights groups such as COYOTE and PONY want decriminalization of prostitution; in other words, they want to change the laws that call for the arrest and prosecution of people who sell sex. Other proponents of legalization want decriminalization but also some regulation by the state in the form of licensing and regulation of brothels, mandatory health certification of prostitutes, and the like. The North American Task Force on Prostitution, a small committee of activists, wants legalization because they believe it would lead to the development of "occupational regulations" and the calming influence

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of government oversight. One can only imagine the quandary OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) would face trying to develop such guidelines.

But like entrepreneurs everywhere, many prostitutes are wary of too much regulation, fearing that it could impinge on their independence and further marginalize their access to the market. As early as 1985, the International Committee for Prostitutes Rights, an international umbrella group for sex workers, passed a "world charter" that included strong statements against government regulation in the form of mandatory testing for sexually-transmitted diseases or the creation of red-light districts or zoning restrictions. "Prostitutes should have the freedom to choose their place of work and residence," the statement averred.

One of America's best-known bawdy houses, Nevada's Mustang Ranch, embodied this free-market philosophy. Billed as "America's biggest bordello" and run by the outlandish and tax-evading Joe Conforte, it was Nevada's first legal brothel, opening in 1971. (Nevada is the only state in which prostitution is legal.) Conforte's rhetoric was populist: He bragged that he kept the "house minimums" low enough that the average John could afford a visit. But Conforte was also openly defiant of the federal government's efforts to tax and regulate his enterprise (he appeared to have fewer problems with local tax collectors). He eventually lost a bitter feud with the IRS, which auctioned off the ranch in 1999. Still, by all accounts he treated his employees well. Prostitutes at the Mustang Ranch were considered "independent contractors" and earned upwards of $160 per hour.

Opponents of prostitution pay no heed to the comfortable sums of money earned or avowed statements of independence made by prostitutes. Instead, they argue, prostitutes are desperate women, whose judgment is clouded by the unjust economic deprivation in which they find themselves. The choice to prostitute oneself is not an authentic choice.

Leading the charge against prostitution, today as in the past, are social and religious conservatives. Organizations such as Concerned Women for America argue that prostitution undermines the bedrock social institution of marriage and exploits women, as well as poisoning the country's moral climate. Other groups, such as WHISPER—Women Hurt in Systems of Prostitution Engaged in Revolt—believe all forms of prostitution are akin to violence and must be stopped.

In Nevada, ground zero for prostitution, small groups such as Citizens Against Prostitution have sprung up to try to close down brothels in counties where prostitution is legal. As one activist reasoned, "When something is legal, it's viewed by our children as being acceptable." Arrayed against these local groups are not just brothel owners, but municipal officials who count on the revenue gained from regulating houses of ill repute.

Prostitution Creates Strange Bedfellows at the U.N.

The United Nations thinks it may have the answer to prostitution, but it's one that could give ammunition to legalizers in the U.S. It began with a debate at U.N. headquarters in New York. More than 10,000 women from around the world convened there in June to celebrate the anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action (adopted at the U.N.'s Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995) and to draft a "Beijing Plus Five" agenda for the next five years.

The U.S. delegation, led by Sharon Kotok, moved to delete all pejorative references to prostitution in the draft Beijing Plus Five document. This was no spur-of-the-moment recommendation. When pressed by reporters, Kotok admitted that the move to eliminate negative references to prostitution was part of a strategy by the U.S., Canada, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and the European Union. When other delegates protested the change, arguing that it amounted to legalizing prostitution, the U.S. camp feigned shock. Madeleine Albright and Hillary Clinton—leaders of the White House-U.N. liaison group, the president's Interagency Council on Women—rushed to assure the American public that they despised prostitution.

But Clinton's right hand does not seem to know what his left hand is doing. In January in Vienna, during negotiations over the U.N.'s Convention on Transnational Organized Crime (which covers international sex trafficking), the president's Interagency Council was the driving force behind an effort to add the word "forced" to the definition of prostitution in the document. This is not simply a matter of semantics. Adding the word "forced" is tantamount to regarding voluntary prostitution as legal. Ironically, the language change would make it more difficult to prosecute people who do force women and children into the flesh trade, because prosecutors would have to prove that the women were coerced—a painstaking effort of collecting testimony and corroborating evidence.

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So where, one might ask, do feminists stand on prostitution? More than almost any other issue in contemporary feminism, prostitution exposes serious fault lines in feminism. Only the debates over pornography are as passionate and divisive.

On one side of the debate are feminists who view prostitution as linked to a system of patriarchy—and thus one that is inherently exploitative. Feminists such as Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon echo the sentiments of earlier moral reformers, who spoke of the "predatory nature of the American male," whose "reckless" sexual appetite was "drenched in sin." In a recent letter to the *New York Times*, one angry feminist stated, "legalization makes the state the superpimp" and argued that prostitution, a "misogynistic construct," results in the "cultural devaluation of all women."

However, their approach is to blame the sin, not the sinner—at least not the female sinner. These feminist opponents of prostitution assume that if women weren't functioning in an oppressively patriarchal world—and had equal access to economic resources and political power—they wouldn't choose sex work. And they rarely condemn the women who do choose it. Their sisters in women's studies departments, many of whom have dubbed prostitution a form of "erotic labor," do not share feminists' unease with the subject. Viewed from the safety of the ivory tower, prostitutes are brave, "transgressive" warriors in a patriarchal culture. In her book, *Live Sex Acts: Women Performing Erotic Labor*, Wendy Chapkis, a women's studies professor at the University of Southern Maine in Portland, writes that prostitutes "function as both the literal of sexual slaves and as the most subversive of sexual agents within a sexist social order."

Some feminists have taken women's studies professors to task for celebrating prostitution. Janice Raymond, executive director of the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women and a staunch prostitution-abolitionist, told the feminist periodical *Off Our Backs* that it is "amazing to me" that "these academic critics of capitalism write about the sex industry and think that what we're dealing with here is sex, not sexual exploitation."

Socialists have always pointed to capitalism as the ultimate culprit in women's exploitation. Following Engels, they noted that marriage and prostitution both resembled the inherently corrupt system of private property. Reminiscing in the pages of *Commentary* in 1994, Irving Kristol remembered how he used to "read *The Communist Manifesto*, in which Marx launches a vitriolic attack on the bourgeois family as an institution of legalized prostitution for the unfortunate wives." Early women's rights activists and even some contemporary radical feminists have described marriage as a form of legalized prostitution.

Lurking behind all these debates is the fact that, at its core, prostitution is an economic exchange—and for many

The debate over the word "forced" is fierce because it has long-term implications that are serious for domestic law: If the U.S. signs on to an international convention that distinguishes between forced and chosen prostitution, we implicitly agree with many European countries that non-coerced prostitution is a form of legitimate labor—that prostitutes are "sex workers" rather than denizens of an underground economy. Advocates of legalizing prostitution could then claim correctly that the U.S. was violating international norms, since prostitution is illegal in nearly every state of the Union.

Trafficking is a serious international problem, a multi-billion dollar industry where women and children are sold for the purposes of prostitution and pornography. Laura J. Lederer, director of the Protection Project at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies, estimates that two million children are forced into prostitution every year, almost half of them in Asia.

Until the recent debacle in Vienna, the 1949 U.N. Convention for the Suppression of Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others has served as the definitive international document on prostitution. This convention views any type of "sex work" as illegitimate, even if the participants are hawking their wares consensually.

The problem of international sex trafficking, and the Clinton administration's efforts to undermine the 1949 convention's strong condemnation of all prostitution, has galvanized an unlikely coalition of activists. The National Organization for Women, Planned Parenthood, Gloria Steinem, international human rights groups such as Equality NOW, and religious conservatives such as the leaders of Concerned Women for America, Chuck Colson, and Bill Bennett have all challenged the Clinton administration's recent wrangling over wording.

In response to the assembled outrage of this unusual coalition, the administration issued a feeble defense. They were pursuing the use of the term "forced prostitution," they said, because they did not want to offend European nations that had already legalized prostitution and who were insisting on the language change.

–Christine Stolba

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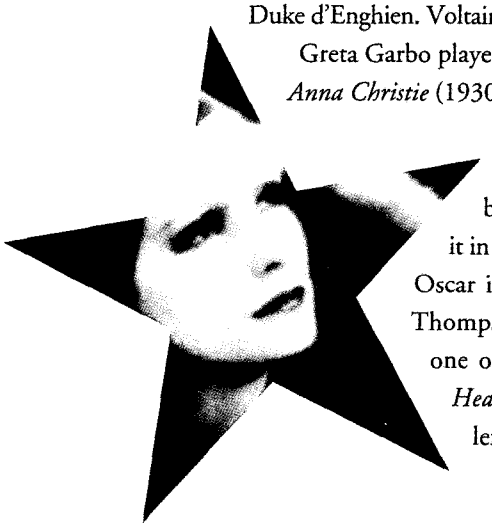
Scarlet Women of the Silver Screen

EVERY AGE, Balzac tells us, gets the prostitutes it deserves. Periclean Athens had Aspasia, the mistress of Pericles, who was known both for her beauty and political influence. Seventeenth-century Paris had Ninon de Lenclos, whose salon attracted Molière and other leading lights of the day. Ninon was mistress to Louis de Bourbon, the Marquis de Sévigné (*père et fils*!), and the Duke d'Enghien. Voltaire helped her manage her considerable fortune.



Greta Garbo played a waterfront streetwalker in her first talkie, *Anna Christie* (1930). The first words Garbo ever uttered on the big screen were: "Gimme a whiskey, ginger ale on the side...and don't be stingy, baby!" Replied the barkeep, "Well, shall I serve it in a pail?" Gloria Swanson was nominated for an Oscar in 1929 for the evil, minister-baiting Sadie Thompson in a film of that name. Jean Harlow was one of the worst of the movie bad girls. In *Red Headed Woman* (1932), Harlow played Lil, who left a bootlegging beau to romance the hapless Bill, her married boss. Refusing to be bought off by Bill's rich father, Lil got Bill but soon fell for Albert, the chauffeur (Charles Boyer). Albert's last glimpse of Lil came years later in Paris—he was at the wheel, while Lil was in the back seat with a rich old man.

Catherine Deneuve was a high-class call girl in Luis Bunuel's *Belle de Jour* (1967), which critic Roger Ebert called "possibly the best-known erotic film of modern times, and perhaps the best." Deneuve was Severine, the twenty-three-year-old wife of a rich and proper surgeon, who adds spice to her life by working in an exclusive Paris brothel where housewives make pin money. Ebert noted that there is "no explicit sex in the movie."

As might be expected, there are many cinematic prostitutes with hearts of gold. Elizabeth Shue took tender care of a dying alcoholic (Nicolas Cage) in *Leaving Las Vegas* (1995). In Josef von Sternberg's *Blonde Venus* (1932), Marlene Dietrich put food on the table for her dying husband by selling her body. In *Mifune*, the recently released Danish comedy, a mother pays for her son's private school by being a prostitute. She learns that one of her clients is the villain who canes the boy at school.

Klute brought us the feminist prostitute. Jane Fonda played a self-assured, self-confident call girl. Still, she was terrorized by a sex-killer. The most disturbing prostitutes are the children—Brooke Shields as Violet, the pre-pubescent prostitute in Louis Malle's *Pretty Baby*, and Jodie Foster as the haunting child-prostitute in Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*.

Julia Roberts was perhaps the happiest movie hooker in *Pretty Woman*. No wages of sin here—Julia snagged Richard Gere. But remember: This is Hollywood.

-Jon Newlin

women, a more lucrative choice than other available options. Advocates of legalization celebrate that choice and want society to view prostitutes not as fallen women, but as fearless sex workers, canny businesswomen who are exploiting a market opportunity. Opponents see them as victims of economic and social oppression.

Both agree that prostitution is big business. Most experts note that it is a multi-billion dollar industry in the U.S., and according to the U.N.'s International Labor Organization, sex work is one of the largest employers and revenue producers for countries in Southeast Asia. In Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand, for example, between 2 and 14 percent of the GDP is produced by the sex tourism industry.

AS AN ECONOMIC ANIMAL, prostitution displays a remarkable adaptability. It finds outlets anywhere, and creates new ones when old ones are blocked off. When police vice squads sweep the streets, prostitution simply goes underground—to massage parlors, escort services, strip clubs, or on the Internet — and continues to thrive.

The quandary over prostitution will only continue. But given the state of our culture it seems likely that public opinion will continue to inch towards legalization. Those who oppose prostitution must be able to put forward compelling reasons why prostitution should remain illegal. In an age that has elevated the pursuit of pleasure to new heights, and where the only thing not tolerated is intolerance, this is no small challenge. ◆

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One last observation . . .

Little Gloria, Happy at Last!

"A woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle."

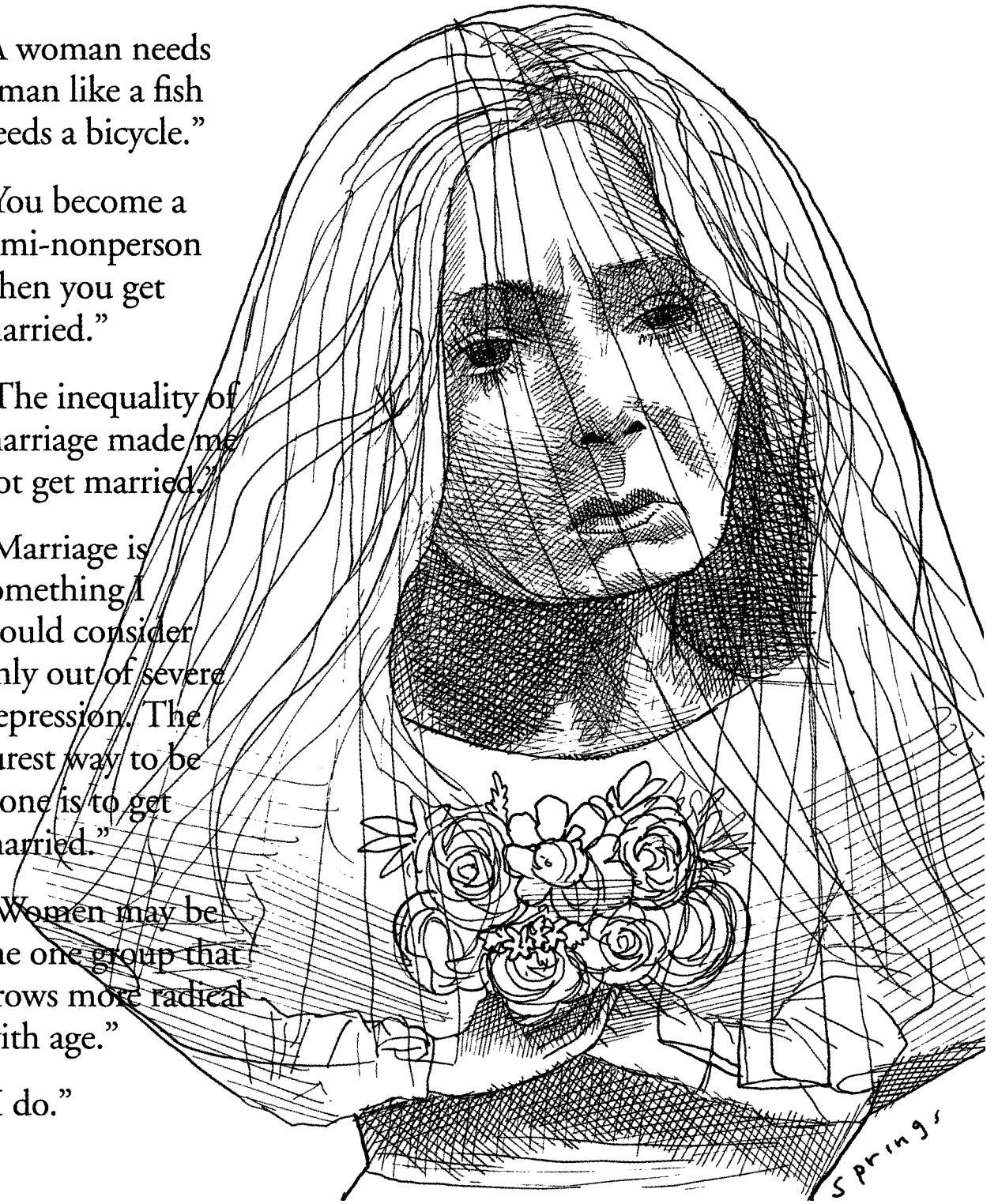
"You become a semi-nonperson when you get married."

"The inequality of marriage made me not get married."

"Marriage is something I would consider only out of severe depression. The surest way to be alone is to get married."

"Women may be the one group that grows more radical with age."

"I do."



Drawing by John Springs

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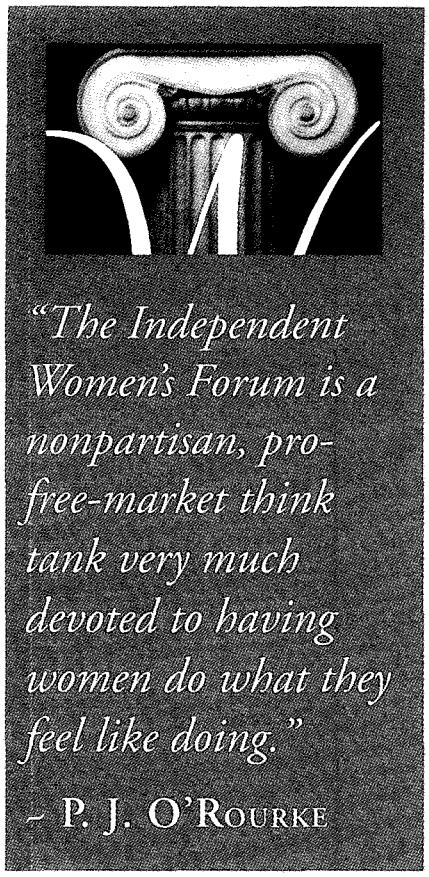
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– P. J. O'Rourke

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